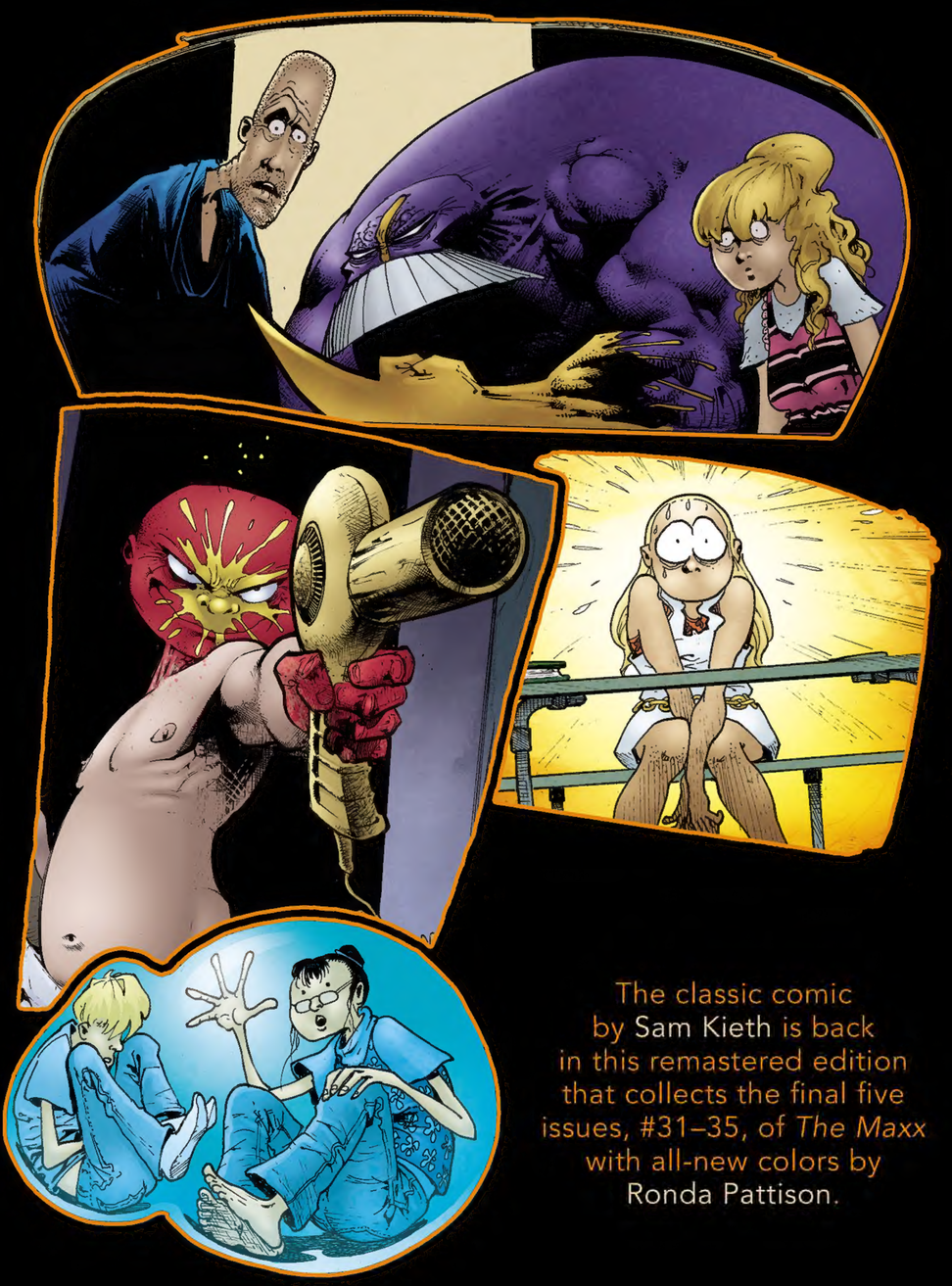
THE MAXX

maximized

Sam Kieth



The classic comic by Sam Kieth is back in this remastered edition that collects the final five issues, #31–35, of *The Maxx* with all-new colors by Ronda Pattison.

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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

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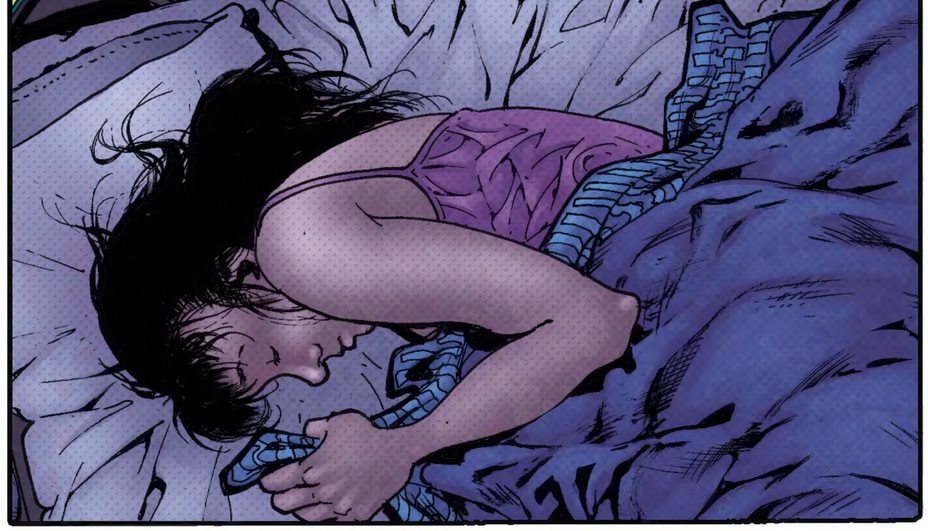

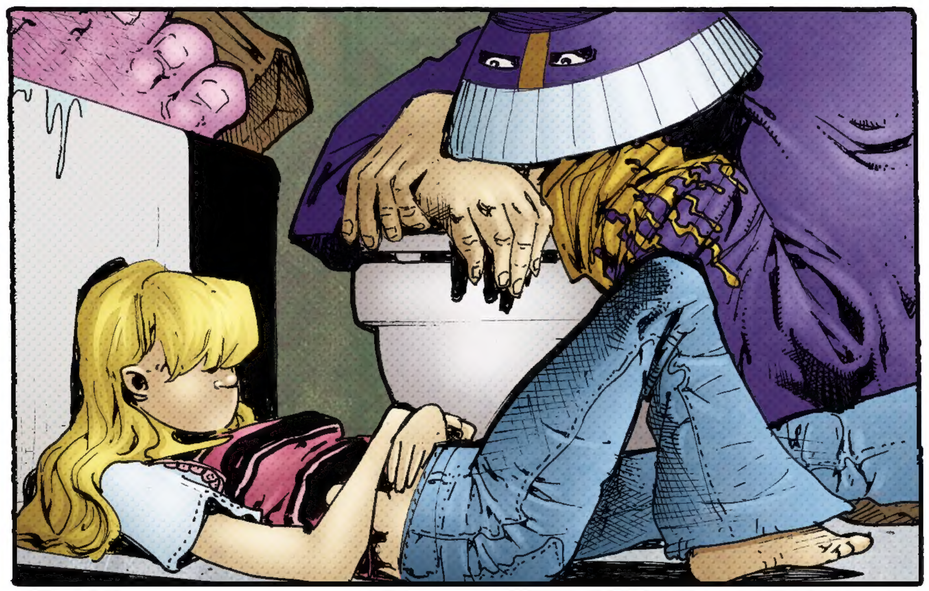

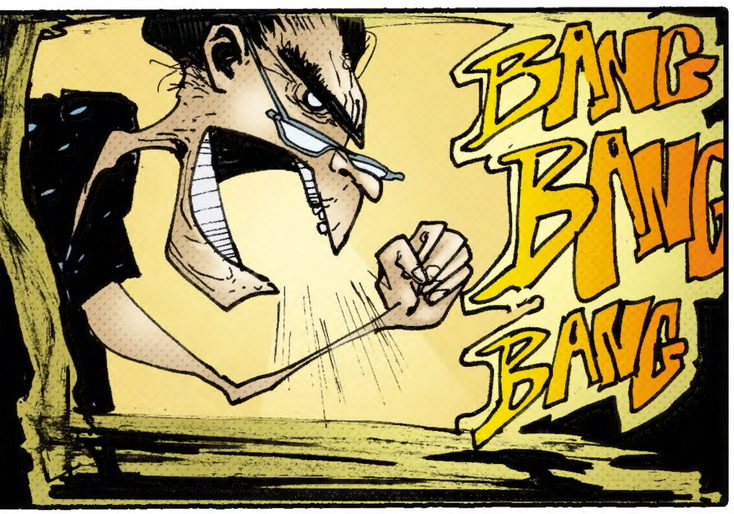

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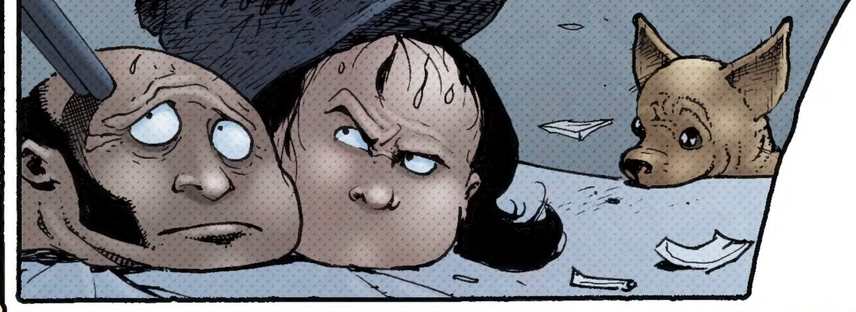

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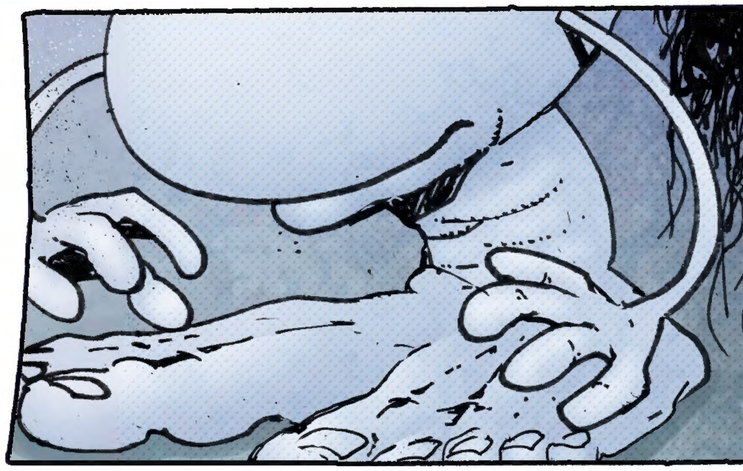

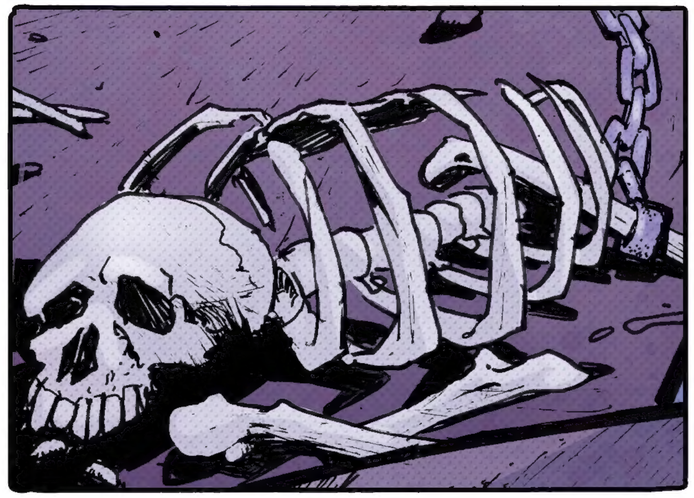

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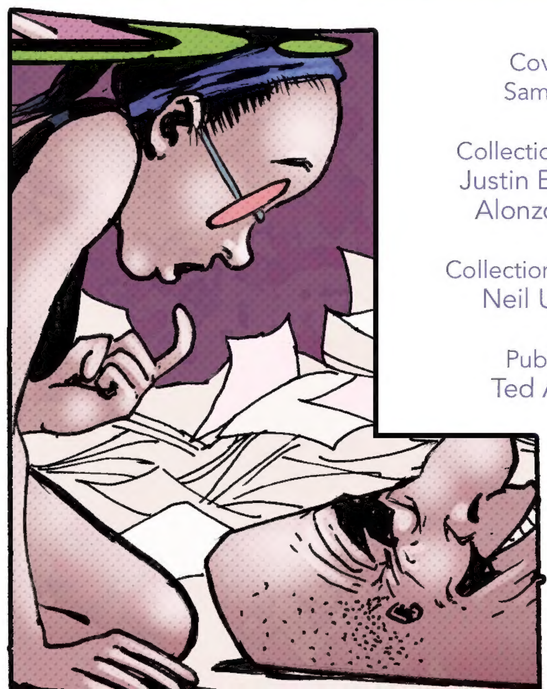

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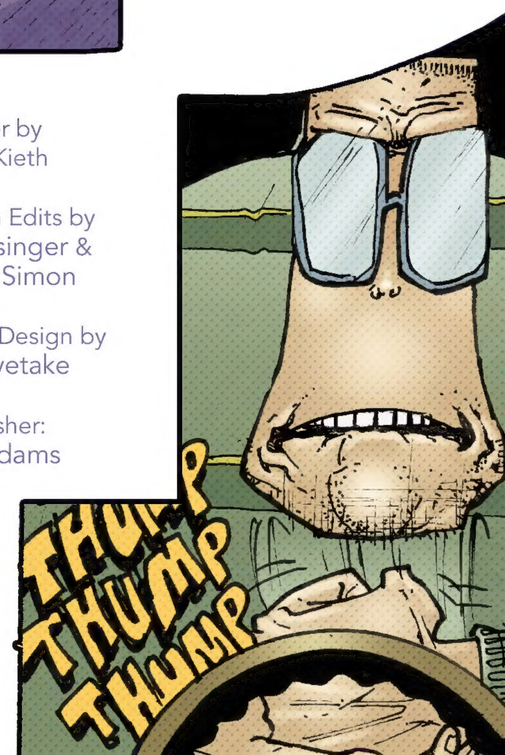

Chapter One

I REMEMBER SARA SAYING WE GOTTA SOAK WHATEVER'S BEHIND THIS DOOR IN WATER ASAP!

WHEN DID SARA TELL HER THAT?

QUIET, MARK. IT LOOKS LIKE A RIBBON OR BOW OR -- HEY! IT'S STARTING TO GLOW!

WHOA! IT'S OVERLOADING!!

IT'S STOPPING NOW. HOLD IT, MARK.

I CAN OPEN IT, MOM. I'M STRONG -- WATCH!

SURE YA ARE, KID. HOW 'BOUT A LITTLE HELP, THOUGH, HUH?

CAREFUL, DAVE -- DON'T DO SOMETHING ...

GRAS

... STUPID ...

IT'S A ...

... A ...

FAIRY ...

... AN INCREDIBLY HUGE FAIRY ...

NO, NO -- IT'S A 300- POUND WHITE IS.

WHAT'S A FAIRY?

IT LOOKS LIKE A GIANT FOOTBALL TO ME.

YOU SEE AN IS, HUH?

YEP.

OBVIOUSLY, WE'RE ALL SEEING WHAT WE WANT TO SEE.

WHAT HAPPENED TO IT, MOM? WHY'S IT SO BIG?

I DUNNO, BUT ...

... WE GOTTA GET IT TO WATER, AND QUICK, LIKE SARA SAID!

HEY DAVE -- WHAT'S A 300- POUND FOOTBALL EAT?

THIS IS SERIOUS, MARK.

I THINK ...

HEY JULIE -- MAYBE THIS IS THAT WHITE IS THAT ESCAPED FROM YOUR OUTBACK INTO OUR WORLD UNCHANGED. REMEMBER?

WHATEVER. :PANT PANT: KEEP PUSHING.

WHERE WE GOIN'?

SARA'S GOT NO BATHTUB -- STEVE TOLD ME THERE'S A TUB EVERYONE SHARES IN THE BASEMENT.

THANK GOD IT FITS... WELL, SORT OF... I WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO MY IS, TO MAKE IT SWELL UP?

YOU MEAN YOUR FOOTBALL. I LIKE THE CLEATS ON HIS FEET.

I HOPE IT DOESN'T SAY SOMETHING ABOUT MY MASCULINITY THAT I'M SEEING PINK FAIRIES.

MARK, GO GET GONE. AND HURRY! HE'LL KNOW WHAT TO DO.

GONE?!? YOU TRUST HIM AFTER WHAT HE DID TO SARA, LETTING HER DISAPPEAR INTO HER OWN OUTBACK?

YOU GOT A BETTER IDEA? ONCE AGAIN WE'RE UP TO OUR BUTTS IN SUPERNATURAL CRAP. IF GONE MEANT WHAT HE SAID ABOUT LOSING SARA *ACCIDENTALLY*, HERE'S HIS CHANCE TO FIND HER, SEND THIS BLIMPO IS BACK TO MY HEAD, AND PUT THINGS RIGHT.

FAIRY.

WHATEVER. LISTEN, DAVE -- I'M GONNA TELL YOU SOMETHING I'VE NEVER TOLD ANYBODY -- NOT MARK OR SARA -- NOBODY. I KNEW THE GIRL PRETTY WELL, AND I DON'T THINK SHE'D MIND IF I TOLD YOU.

OK.

HER NAME WAS MEGAN. SHE WAS A SKINNY GIRL, AROUND 14 OR SO, LIVING WITH HER GRANDPARENTS.

JULIE, WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO WITH A GIANT FAIR-- UH, IS?

KALAMAZOO

YOU GOT SOMETHING BETTER TO DO WHILE WE WAIT FOR GONE?

THIS STORY IS ABOUT SOMETHING, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT. YET.

I THINK IT'S ABOUT FITTING IN. I'M NOT EXACTLY YOUR TYPICAL TEENAGE GIRL. I'M A SKINNY TOMBOY, LOVE OLD FASHIONED MUSIC, AND HAVE WEIRD THOUGHTS.

I'M NOT SURE I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO ALL THIS GROWING UP CRAP.

PUBERTY IS BEGINNING TO SOUND LIKE SOME SORT OF DISEASE.

MEGAN, ARE YOU LISTENING?

UH HUH.

I'M NOT GOING TO KEEP GIVING YOU A LIFT TO THE LIBRARY IF YOU DON'T STOP UPSETTING YOUR GRANNY! IGNORING HER PHONE CALLS IS GONNA KILL HER ONE DAY! IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT?!?

WELL, IS IT?!?

THUMP THUMP THUMP

UH HUH.

THAT'S MY GIRL.

I CAN'T HEAR GRAMPS...

... BUT WHEN HE'S PUNCHING HIS HAND, "UH HUH" USUALLY COVERS IT.

HEH. YOU KIDS AND YOUR MUSIC TODAY.

DOES HE KNOW I'M LISTENING TO MUSIC FROM THE 1940'S?

DOES HE EVEN ASK?

NOW REMEMBER, MEGAN --

YEAH, YEAH, I KNOW. "STAY DOWNSTAIRS SO I CAN SEE IF GRANNY'S CALLING ON THE PAY PHONE OUTSIDE." DO YOU HAVE TO TELL ME *EVERY* TIME?

GRANNY CALLS AT LEAST 12 TIMES A DAY AND OVERWHELMS ME WITH POINTLESS QUESTIONS THAT ANYONE COULD ANSWER. TO HER AND GRAMPS, THIS SEEMS NORMAL. WE'RE SUPPOSED TO JUMP WHEN SHE CALLS, AND WE ALL TAKE CARE OF HER, BUT I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH HER.

IF ANYTHING.

I KNOW YOU THINK I'M AN OLD FOGEY, BUT I LOVE YOU, MEGAN.

OK, OK GEEZ. TELL THE WORLD.

OH GOD!

RINGG

WELL -- THAT'S PROBABLY HER NOW!

GO ON -- ANSWER IT.

I WILL, I PROMISE. JUST GO ON TO WORK.

SHE'S WAITING.

ALRIGHT, ALREADY!

HULLO. YEAH, HI GRANNY. YEAH YEAH, I KNOW IT KEPT RINGING, BUT WE JUST GOT HERE -- NO, HE'S LEFT...

YAK YAK YAK NAG NAG NAG YAK NAG BLAH BLAH BLAH YADDA YADDA YADDA GUILT GUILT GUILT

YES, GRANNY. GOODBYE.

THERE'S THE EVIL DOOR. I VOWED NEVER TO PASS THROUGH IT SINCE "THE EVENT" OF 1973. I WAS 11.

I WON'T EVEN GO INTO IT. TRUST ME -- I HAVE MY REASONS.

I MUST USE THE UPSTAIRS ENTRANCE TO GO INSIDE.

RETREAT, EVIL DOOR! BACK!!

ONCE INSIDE, I GO DOWNSTAIRS WHERE IT'S SAFE AND COOL.

OH CRAP! LATE FOR CLASS!

AND SINCE THE EVIL DOOR BLOCKS MY WAY, I HAVE TO REVERSE IT ALL TO GET TO GRANNY'S PHONE!

I HATE THE OUTSIDE. TOO MUCH NOISE, FRESH AIR, AND DISTRACTION.

I LIKE THE DOWNSTAIRS LIBRARY, WHICH IS COOL, DARK AND MOULDY. I HIDE AND LISTEN TO MY '40'S MUSIC. NOTHING EVER CHANGES IN THE LIBRARY. IT'S GREAT.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE BIG DEAL IS ABOUT GROWING UP. ALL ADULTS I KNOW ARE IDIOTS. AT LEAST I CAN *FEEL* STUFF.

WHEN PEOPLE GET OLDER, I THINK SOMETHING IN THEM DIES. WHY ELSE ARE ADULTS SO CONDESCENDING TO TEENAGERS?

GRAMPS MAKES ME TAKE THIS HEALTH CLASS AT THE LIBRARY.

IT'S TORTURE.

BUT IT'S NOT A *JOKE*, OR A *PHASE*... IT'S *REAL!!* WHY CAN'T ADULTS SEE THAT?

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOU? ON YOUR MARK, GET SET, *GROW!!!* YOU'RE GOING THROUGH PUBERTY!

MY GOD, SHE THINKS WE'RE 9 YEARS OLD.

DEODORANTS.

CRUSHES.

TRAINING BRAS.

DATING.

PUBIC HAIR!

IT'S ALL A NORMAL, HEALTHY PART OF THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL CHANGES THAT AWAIT YOU ON YOUR SPECIAL JOURNEY TO WOMANHOOD!

OK, LET'S SAY HELLO TO MS. TAMPON.

HELLO, MISS TAMPON.

SHUT UP, SALLY!

YOU SHUT UP!

GIRLS, SETTLE DOWN!

THIS IS EMBARRASSING AND PATHETIC FOR EVERYONE. I GOTTA BAIL. IT'S THE ONLY HUMANE THING TO DO.

HEY, TEACHER -- CAN I GO TO THE BATHROOM?

OK, MEGAN, BUT DON'T RUN OFF LIKE LAST TIME.

THESE CLASSES ARE RUINING THE LIBRARY AS MY HAVEN. I DON'T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT BOOBS AND CRAMPS -- I JUST WANT TO LISTEN TO OLD-FASHIONED MUSIC AND ...

...ESCAPE.

:SIGH: EVERY TIME I GO UPSTAIRS, I HAVE TO WALK BY THIS ...

...CRAZY LADY...

... THAT MUMBLES TO HERSELF.

KIWI, KIWI...

SHE ALWAYS CREEPS ME OUT! I'M ALWAYS SURE SHE'S GONNA BITE MY LEG OR SOMETHING.

I NORMALLY HATE IT OUTSIDE, BUT ANYTHING'S BETTER THAN PUBERTY 101.

THE BIG GIRLS PLAY LOUD, PRIMITIVE DISCO RHYTHMS FROM ACROSS THE PARK. THEY'RE ALL SO HAPPY AND HEALTHY, I WANNA PUKE. THEY ARE THE SOCCER GIRLS ... MY MORTAL ENEMIES.

SURE, SURE. HUNCHED-OVER POSTURE, LOOKING DOWN, TURNED AWAY FROM THE CROWD...

... EVERYTHING ABOUT ME SAYS "PICK ON THIS ONE."

WELL, AREN'T YOU GONNA THROW IT BACK?

HEY LOSER -- YOU DEAF, OR JUST ...

... CHICKEN?!?

HEY GIRLS, THIS RUNT JUST CALLED ME OUT!

DID NOT, FIDO.

OK -- YOU'RE DEAD!

OK GOLDIE. I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR ME! GET UP SO I CAN HEAR *YOU* ... OR ELSE!

C'MON, PATTY, LAY OFF HER.

YEAH ...

... I THOUGHT SO.

WHY CAN'T THEY LEAVE ME ALONE? DO THEY HATE THEMSELVES SO MUCH THAT THEY HAVE TO HATE ME, TOO?

WIMP.

PATTY, C'MON.

I DON'T KNOW WHY BOYS TEAM UP AND PULL THAT "HEY, GIRL, MY FRIEND LIKES YOU" CRAP. TWO LITTLE PUNKS LIKE THIS SHOULDN'T BOTHER ME. I'M BIGGER 'N STRONGER THAN BOTH OF THEM, BUT WHEN THEY RAZZ ME, I WON'T STAND UP TO THEM.

C'MON YOU TWERPS -- JUST DO IT. GET IT OVER WITH.

WWOOOSH

HEY! NOT MY HOMEWORK!

OH GREAT -- NOT THE EVIL DOOR AGAIN.

TAP TAP TAP TAP

HA HA HA...

WHATSAMATTER, BITCH? SCARED?

OK, PRIMATES! GIVE IT BACK!!!

♪♫ MEG-AN'S AFRAID... ♫♪

DAYS LIKE THIS, MY ONLY ESCAPE IS...

... MUSIC.
I CRAWL INTO MY MUSIC WOMB AND FORGET ALL THIS BULLSH*T. I HATE THE TIME I'M LIVING IN. THE LATE '70'S SUCK. EVERYTHING'S PLASTIC-POP.
MUSIC, MOVIES, THE WAY PEOPLE TALK WAS SO COOL IN THE '40'S! I WAS BORN IN THE WRONG TIME. 1930-45 WOULD BE PERFECT. I FEEL SAFE IN THE PAST. THAT KIND OF MUSIC... SOOTHES ME. WELL IT DID, UNTIL...
OH, GOD -- NOT THE SOCCER SLUTS AGAIN!
I BET THEY THINK I'D LIKE TO BE OUT THERE.
WELL, THEY'RE WRONG...
I'LL JUST TURN *MINE* UP.
NO GOOD. THEIR BASS IS JUST DROWNING IT OUT
THAT GIRL'S UP TO SOMETHING...
AW, SHE'S JUST A KID. WHAT COULD *SHE* DO.
PLENTY! WHY IS SHE ALWAYS RUNNING UP AND DOWN THOSE STAIRS? WHY CAN'T SHE USE THE BACKDOOR, LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE?
AT LEAST OVER HERE IT'S QUIET.
RRKIIIINGGGG
CRAP! SIXTH TIME TODAY...

THE EVIL SOCCER GIRL MOCKS ME.

LOOK AT 'EM RUNNING AROUND, LAUGHING, HAVING FUN, GIGGLING LIKE IDIOTS. HORMONES HAVE TURNED THEIR BRAINS TO PUDDING. THEY'RE ACTING LIKE ANIMALS. DISGUSTING.

I'M TOO SKINNY TO EVER GROW UP AND BE LIKE THEM, ANYWAY.

THE LIBRARY LETS ME WATCH OLD MOVIES IN THE BACK HERE. I'VE BECOME HOOKED ON THIS ONE ABOUT A YOUNG GIRL...

... WHO LETS HER HUSBAND, MAXIM, TREAT HER LIKE A CHILD.

WHY? I THINK SHE *WANTS* TO BE AN ADULT, BUT SHE'S SCARED.

SEE, MAXIM'S FIRST WIFE, REBECCA, IS SOMEONE A GIRL COULD NEVER LIVE UP TO.

THE NEW WIFE THINKS MAXIM'S STILL IN LOVE WITH REBECCA ...

... SO SHE STAYS A CHILD ...

.. AFRAID TO COMPETE.

MY FAVORITE PART IS WHERE THE EVIL MRS. DANVERS GETS HER TO FEEL REBECCA'S UNDERWEAR.

NOT THAT I'M INTO THAT OR NOTHING.

IT'S JUST SO WEIRD FOR AN OLD MOVIE.

YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE THIS ROOM, HAVEN'T YOU?

IT'S LOVELY, ISN'T IT. EVERYTHING HAS BEEN KEPT JUST AS MRS. DEWINTERS LIKED IT.

NOTHING HAS BEEN ALTERED SINCE... *THAT* NIGHT.

COME, I'LL SHOW YOU HER DRESSING ROOM.

THIS IS WHERE I KEEP ALL HER CLOTHES.

YOU'D LIKE TO SEE THEM...

... WOULDN'T YOU.

FEEL THIS.

I KEEP HER UNDERWEAR ON THIS SIDE.

THEY WERE MADE SPECIALLY BY THE NUNS IN THE CONVENT OF ST. CLAIR.

SOMETIMES WHEN I WALK ALONG THE CORRIDOR...

... I FANCY I HEAR HER STEPS BEHIND ME.

DO YOU THINK THE DEAD COME BACK AND WATCH THE LIVING?

:SOB: I DON'T BELIEVE IT. :SNIFF:

SUMPIN'S UP. WHAT'S THAT BUMPIN' NOISE?

YOU LOOK TIRED.

CLICK

HEY, LITTLE MISSY! UNLOCK THIS DOOR!

I KNOW YER UP T' SUMPIN'!

WHY DON'T YOU STAY HERE AWHILE...

CAN YOU HEAR ME?!? OPEN UP!

... AND REST...

CRASH!

... LISTEN TO THE SEA...

GREAT! I BROKE THE WALL! HEY -- LOOKEE BACK HERE! WHAT A COOL LITTLE PLACE TO HIDE!

HMm. THIS GIVES ME AN IDEA. LET ME GET THESE HEADPHONES OFF.

IF YOU DON'T UNLOCK THE DOOR *THIS INSTANT...*

BIG BAD BANG

OH GOD!

BANG BANG BANG

... I'LL GET THE SECURITY GUARD!

CAN'T BREATHE!

AND I CAN'T BUTTON FAST ENOUGH!

... COMING! I JUST... SORRY...

OK, PROJECTOR OFF. OH CRAP! THE WALL!! THINK, THINK...

IF SECURITY HAS TO UNLOCK THIS DOOR...

NO, WAIT! I JUST HAVE TO OPEN THE...

WHEW! LOOKS OK.

I'M COMING!

...SHADES...

OK, MISSY! IF I KNEW WHO YOUR PARENTS WERE, I'D CALL 'EM RIGHT NOW!!! AND IF I EVER CATCH YOU LOCKIN' THIS DOOR AGAIN...

... YER BANNED FROM THE LIBRARY!!!!

OK, OK, OK...

AND QUIT TYIN' UP THAT PHONE, TALKIN' TO YER BOYFRIENDS!!!!!!

RING RING RING RING RING

SHE'S YELLING IN PUBLIC! TOTAL HUMILIATION!!!

OH GOD -- EVERYONE'S STARING AT ME.

OK, IF THERE WAS ANYONE *AROUND*, THEY'D BE STARING AT ME.

HEY! THE PHONE'S *THAT* WAY!

NOT FOR ME.

CRAZY LADY, CRAZY LADY.

KIWI, KIWI.

IT STOPPED. THANK GOD SHE GAVE UP.

HONK! HONK!

17 RINGS, NUMBNUT.

BUSTED.

MY SHAME IS COMPLETE. I'M JUST LIKE THE GIRL IN THE MOVIE...

... ONLY GRAMPS IS MAXIM, THE EVIL LIBRARIAN IS MRS. DANVERS, AND GRANNY IS THE GHOST OF REBECCA, WHO HAUNTS ME. *SIGH*

BACK AT HOME, ME N' GRAMPS TIPTOE IN, FOR FEAR OF UPSETTING GRANNY. GRAMPS WALKS ON EGGSHELLS TO KEEP HER HAPPY, WHICH ONLY MAKES HER MORE GROUCHY.

EVEN THOUGH SHE TAKES SUGAR PILLS, WE'RE SUPPOSED TO ACT LIKE SHE'S DYING.

I DON'T KNOW WHY. IT'S GRAMPS -- HE'S THE ONE THAT'S GONNA DITCH US, AND LEAVE ME HERE WITH HER.

NOW YOU'RE ALREADY ON *THIN ICE*, IGNORING GRANNY'S CALLS LIKE THAT. MEGAN, YOU'LL BE THE DEATH OF HER SOME DAY IF YOU KEEP MISBEHAVING! SHE *NEEDS* YOU.

WELL, SHE'S NOT THE *ONLY* ONE BEING IGNORED.

NO LIP, YOUNG LADY.

SEE, MOMMA -- THE HEADPHONES MAKE IT HARD FOR MEGGY TO HEAR THE PHONE.

WHINE WHINE YAK BLAH WHINE NE YAK YAK YAK WHINE WHINE WHINE BLAH BLAH

UH HUH.

YOU'RE RIGHT -- MAYBE SHE SHOULDN'T BE LISTENING TO ROCK MUSIC AT THE LIBRARY, ANYWAY.

SO THAT'S SETTLED! NO HEADPHONES AT THE LIBRARY, AND YOU ANSWER THE PHONE *EVERY TIME* GRANNY CALLS. GOT IT?

UH HUH.

OR...

... HOW 'BOUT I MAKE A *LIST* OF WHERE ALL YOUR STUFF IS SO YOU WON'T HAVE TO CALL ME OR DAD?

I DON'T LIKE LISTS.

SHE DON'T LIKE LISTS! MEGAN, SHE NEEDS *BOTH* OF US TO BE THERE FOR HER! YOU'RE YOUNG, YOU'VE GOT YOUR WHOLE LIFE. THIS IS *HER* TIME. DON'T BE SELFISH.

DON'T FORGET MY DINNER. AND MY BEDPAN NEEDS CHANGING.

OK, MOMMA. JUS' A SEC.

WHEN YOU IGNORE HER NEEDS, YOU'RE ONLY HURTING YOURSELF. YOU'VE GOT TO GROW UP SOMEDAY, MEGAN. WE CAN'T BABY YOU FOREVER.

YEAH, WE KNOW WHO THE BABY OF *THIS* FAMILY IS.

Ways To Torture Yourself #107

EARL!

COMING, MOMMA.

MEGAN DON'T MAKE ME NAG YOU. GET STARTED WITH THAT HOMEWORK.

NO PROBLEM, GRAMPS.

IF I CAN'T DO *THIS*, I'M PATHETIC.

C'MON, MEGAN. IT'S BEEN 20 MINUTES AND YOU'RE JUST DIDDLING AROUND. JUST DO IT.

OK, I WILL.

BUT I WONT... I *KNOW* I WON'T -- I ALWAYS DO THIS.

IT'S BEEN AN HOUR. IF YOU WOULD'VE STARTED, YOU COULD'VE BEEN *DONE* BY NOW.

I WILL, IN A MINUTE. BUT I GOTTA SHARPEN MY PENCIL FIRST.

I GOTTA... UH... GO OUT... I WONT BE BACK TIL LATE, PUNKIN.

MAN, I'M GETTING SLEEPY. I'LL GET UP EARLY AND DO IT. IN THE MORNING...

I'M SICK OF HIM RAGGING ON ME. WISH HE'D JUST BUTT OUT.

YOU KNOW YOU WON'T, PRINCESS.

TONIGHT. DON'T LET ME DOWN.

TOMORROW. I PROMISE.

WHAT'S THE POINT? I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO GET ANYTHING DONE. LOSER.

I FEEL SO GUILTY. I'VE BLOWN IT ANYWAY. IT'S TOO LATE NOW, I'VE LET HIM DOWN. HE'S RIGHT -- I CAN'T FINISH ANYTHING.

BUT *NEXT* TIME, I'LL GET UP EARLY AND DO IT.

REALLY I WILL...

... NEXT... TIME...

... NE.....

... SNORRRRRE...

Blaming Others #368

RISE 'N SHINE, PUNKIN.

C'MON, MEGAN -- DON'T FIGHT ME ON THIS. GET UP. AND FINISH YOUR HOMEWORK.

I KNOW YOU GET ANGRY WHEN I HAVE TO GO OUT, BUT I'VE GOT NO CHOICE. I KNOW YOU'RE AFRAID I'M GONNA LEAVE. BUT NOTHING WILL HAPPEN TO ME UNTIL YOU'RE READY.

:YAWN: OK -- I'M JUST GONNA CATCH A FEW WINKS. :YAWN: THEN WE'LL GET UP.

WHY DOESN'T HE *MAKE* ME GET UP AND DO IT?

I PROMISE.

FINE! HE TALKS TO ME ALL NIGHT SO I CAN'T GET MY HOMEWORK DONE...

...THEN EXPECTS ME TO GET *MYSELF* UP! I CAN'T BE EXPECTED TO DO THAT. I'M JUST A KID.

YOU'RE GROUNDED FOR IGNORING GRANNY YEATERDAY.

BUT...

NO LIBRARY. STAY PUT -- I MEAN IT. DON'T LEAVE THIS HOUSE!!!

BUS STOP

YEAH... WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT.

WOW! I GOT HERE SO EARLY, THERE'S HARDLY ANYBODY AROUND. GOOD! THIS WAY, NOBODY WILL SEE ME BUILD MY SECRET NEST.

PUNK

IF I CAN GET BACK HOME BEFORE GRAMPS GETS BACK, AND GRANNY DOESN'T FIND OUT I'M GONE, I MIGHT GET AWAY WITH THIS.

GOODY! DOOR TO THE MOVIE ROOM'S NOT LOCKED.

THIS CRACK GAVE ME AN IDEA. I'LL BUILD A SECRET CUBBYHOLE TO WATCH OLD MOVIES IN.

'COURSE I CAN'T LOCK THE DOOR, BUT BURIED BACK IN HERE, NOBODY CAN SEE WHAT I'M UP TO ANYWAY.

IT'LL BE MY SAFE PLACE, TO MAKE MYSELF HAPPY IN. I WON'T NEED ANYONE... I WON'T NEED SQUAT.

JUST CLOSE THE "SECRET DOORWAY"...

... PERFECT.

click

NOW TO RELAX WITH SOME NAT KING COLE TRIO AND MILLS BROS. WHILE IT'S STILL QUIET...

BOOGIE NIGHTS BOOGIE NIGHTS

OOOOHH-AAAHHHH

OH GOODY. LOOK WHO COMES TO THE PARK TO PLAY SOCCER EARLY. MY PALS..

GOD, HOW I MISSED 'EM.

BOOGIE WOOGIE THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP BOOGIE

DIE, SOCCER SCUM, DIE, SOCCER SCUM, DIE, SOCCER SCUM...

SHOOT-SOMEBODY'S USING MY MOVIE ROOM. OH WELL, AT LEAST MY CRACK'S COVERED.

LAST NIGHT I HAD A DREAM. I WAS BEING PULLED TOWARD THE EVIL DOOR! I TRIED TO RUN, BUT IT WAS USELESS! AS I WENT THROUGH IT, I BECAME AN OLD WOMAN.

I LOOKED ACROSS TO THE PARK AND SAW A BUNCH OF KIWIS WITH LITTLE UNIFORMS, PLAYING SOCCER. I WENT OVER AND STARTED EATING THEM, WHICH THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO MIND, AND, WELL, I WAS PRETTY HUNGRY, AFTER ALL.

I COULD FEEL THEM GIGGLING IN MY OLD-WOMAN BELLY, AND HAD JUST ABOUT FINISHED THE LAST ONE, WHEN MRS. DANVERS FROM MY OLD MOVIE SHOWED UP! SHE STARTED TO YELL AT ME, ONLY GRANNY'S VOICE CAME OUT.

SHE SAID I LET HER DOWN, AND GRAMPS WAS LEAVING BECAUSE I BLEW HEALTH CLASS, AND I FEEL SO GUILTY 'CAUSE I KNOW SHE'S RIGHT. THEN SHE HEARS LAUGHING COMING FROM INSIDE MY BELLY, AND *KNEW* I LIKED KIWIS. I WAS BUSTED. THEN I WOKE UP. WEIRD HUH? OH WELL -- ENOUGH DREAMS, ALREADY!

THEN IT HAPPENED.

SHE WALKED IN.

LIKE SOME GREEK GODDESS COME TO LIFE.

WHAT A FOX.

IMPOSSIBLY LONG LEGS,

GOLDEN HAIR SPILLING OUT BEHIND HER,

SHE PASSED CLOSE ENOUGH TO TOUCH, TO BREATH ON.

SHE WAS ATHENA, GOLDEN GODDESS. A *QUEEN*... A SOCCER QUEEN.

... SHE WAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL CREATURE IN EXISTENCE --

...AT LEAST TO ME.

SHE WAS AN "AMAZON SOCCER QUEEN OF LOVE."

JUST WATCHING HER DO THE MOST MENIAL OF TASKS IS A SPIRITUAL EVENT.

HEALTHY, GRACEFUL, MAGICAL...

... EVERYTHING I'M NOT.

AND THEN SHE DID SOMETHING *AMAZING*...

... SHE TOOK A DRINK!

WELL, IT WAS THE *WAY* SHE TOOK IT.

AND JUST LIKE THAT, SHE HEADED OFF, TOWARD THE LIGHT, BACK WHERE SHE CAME FROM. THEN, LIKE A SLAP IN THE FACE...

IT HIT ME! MY MIND WENT BLANK AS I WONDERED WHY THIS SOCCER QUEEN HAD SUCH AN EFFECT ON ME.

FOR ONE THING, THIS GODDESS WAS MILES PAST THOSE BIMBOS IN THE PARK. SHE DIDN'T EVEN WEAR THE SAME UNIFORM -- SHE BELONGED TO SOME *HIGHER RACE OF GOLDEN SOCCER WOMEN*, WHO *SURELY* MUST LOVE '40'S MUSIC -- SHE WOULDN'T BE COOL IF SHE DIDN'T!

YEAH, SHE WAS BEYOND US MORTALS, FOR SURE.

OH GOD! WHAT IF SHE *SAW* ME -- GAWKING LIKE AN IDIOT AT HER? OH, GREAT! NOW SHE PROB'LY THINKS I'M SOME SORT OF PERVERT WHO'S STALKING HER!

HEY! WAIT A MINUTE!

GEEZ -- I GOTTA GET A LIFE.

SOMEBODY LIKE HER *MUST* BE USED TO HAVING PEOPLE STARE AT HER IN AWE. SHE'S *THAT* AMAZING! SHE'D UNDERSTAND ME LOOKING -- I'M SURE SHE WOULD.

WAIT -- DON'T GO! I DON'T EVEN KNOW YOUR NAME!

THEN I SEE WHO SHE'S WITH.

MY WORST ENEMIES -- THOSE OBNOXIOUS DISCO IDIOTS.

HOW COULD ONE AS TRANSCENDENT AS HER HANG OUT WITH SUCH LOW-LIFE SCUM?

THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW I EXIST.

THE EVIL DOOR MOCKS MY FEAR OF EVEN CROSSING THE STREET AND TALKING TO HER.

EVEN IF I DID, WHAT WOULD I SAY?

"HI I'M MEGAN. WATCHING YOU TAKE A DRINK FROM THE WATER FOUNTAIN WAS THE MOST SPIRITUALLY ORGASMIC EXPERIENCE OF MY 14-YEAR-OLD VIRGINAL LIFE."

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS... THERE'S CHOCOLATE.

BESIDES, WHO NEEDS OUTSIDE STUFF ANYWAY? I'D ONLY GET MY HEART STOMPED TO BITS OUT THERE...

IN HERE, I'M COZY AND SAFE.

THEY WERE MADE SPECIALLY BY THE NUNS IN THE CONVENT OF ST. CLAIR.

SOMETIMES, WHEN I WALK DOWN THE CORRIDOR, I FANCY I HEAR HER FOOTSTEPS BEHIND ME.

FEEL THIS. I KEEP HER UNDERWEAR ON THIS SIDE.

I LOVE THIS PART.

HEY, LITTLE MISSY! THIS DOOR'S LOCKED!

DO YOU THINK THE DEAD COME BACK AND WATCH THE LIVING?

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE?

:SOB: I DON'T BELIEVE IT. :SNIFF:

YER UP T' SUMPIN'...

I KNOW IT!

STAY HERE AWHILE AND REST...

BUMP!

AND THAT'S MEGAN'S STORY -- OR THE FIRST PART.

OH YEAH? LISTEN, JULIE, THIS "GIRL" YOU KNOW -- WOULDN'T HAPPEN TO BE BASED ON A CERTAIN *OTHER* TEENAGER, WOULD IT?

THIS GIRL LIVED WITH HER GRANDPARENTS, DAVE.

YOU'RE FISHIN'. IT'S NOT IMPORTANT *WHO* SHE IS -- IT'S IMPORTANT WHAT SHE WENT THROUGH.

DIDN'T YOU TELL ME YOU SPENT A WHOLE SUMMER WITH YOUR GRANDPARENTS ONCE?

OK, WHAT'RE YOU GOING THROUGH, "MEGAN"?

MAXX, I'M NOT --

'SCUSE ME, BUT I UNDERSTAND YOU CALLED.

WELL, IT'S ABOUT TIME. JULIE'S HEARING SARA'S VOICE IN --

SARA'S NO LONGER IN HER OUTBACK. AND SHE'S NOT WATER, EITHER. SHE HASN'T GOT A BODY TO RETURN TO. THE QUESTION IS: WHERE IS SHE?

THE WOMAN I BROUGHT IS HER ONLY CHANCE TO STRAIGHTEN IT ALL OUT. SHE'S WAITING OUTSIDE. I BELIEVE YOU KNOW HER AS...

HEY MOM, LOOK -- THE *FOOTBALL THING'S* WAKING UP!

MAXX, WHAT'S WITH THE LAMPSHADE?

HEY -- IT WAS YOUR IDEA, REMEMBER

WELL, LET'S SEE IF WE CAN'T TWEAK IT A BIT.

LESSEE..... *THERE!*

YES!!! THE OLD MAXX IS BACK!

BUT YOU'RE STILL *DAVE*, TOO, RIGHT?

WHO'S DAVE?

SH*T!

DADDY -- WHAT'S HAPPENING?

SARA?

Chapter Two

THE

THE WOMAN I BROUGHT IS OUR ONLY CHANCE TO STRAIGHTEN THIS ALL OUT. SHE'S WAITING OUTSIDE. I BELIEVE YOU KNOW HER AS...

HEY MOM, LOOK -- THE *FOOTBALL THING'S* WAKING UP!

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LESSEE.....*THERE!*

YES!!! THE OLD MAXX'S BACK!

BUT YOU'RE STILL DAVE, TOO -- RIGHT?

WHO'S DAVE?

SH*T!

HEY THESE BUBBLES HAVE...

DADDY, WHAT'S HAPPENING?

SARA?

...BUGS IN 'EM?

MATTOX, COME HERE, DAMMIT!

OH GOD, IT'S THE *URN!* GLORIE, DON'T *OPEN IT!!!!*

...BUT THERE'S LIGHT INSIDE...

ARTIE, IT'S GETTING...

...BRIGHTER.

HEY LARRY -- WHAT HAPPENED? EVERYTHING'S SORT OF...

...DISAPPEARED.

WHAT DOES IRWIN SAY HAPPENED, JOHN?

WHO GIVES A RAT'S ASS!? HE COULD'VE ***MENTIONED*** THAT THE CREEP HE SENT US TO RUB OUT TURNS PEOPLE INTO BUGS, FER #@*!! CRISSAKE!!!

NOW, LARRY, I'M ***SURE*** MAJ. ROSENTHAL HAS A ***LARGER*** PLAN ON HIS MIND.

YEAH, MARK, YOU ***LOOK*** OLDER, TOO. IN YOUR TEENS, I'D SAY...

I SAW AN ANGEL, HIS NAME WAS IRWIN, AND HE SAID THESE BUBBLES RETURN US TO OUR UNBORN SELVES.

GLORIE, WHAT HAPPENED? I FEEL ***BIGGER***.

GREAT. WHAT GOOD IS ***THAT?***

GLORIE -- WAIT! WE'RE BREAKING APART!!!

IT'S OK, MARK. NOTHING CAN HURT US HERE -- IT'S ***SAFE!*** THE ANGEL SAID SO.

DON'T RESIST-- JUST FOLLOW YOUR BUBBLE, I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN, I PROMISE...

GLORIE'S STORY

LOOK IN YOUR BUBBLE CENTER, MARK, AND THE PAST WILL BECOME...

...CLEAR.

HI, GLORIE.

DADDY!!

HERE SWEETY. IT'S A PRESENT. IT HELPS YOU BREATHE.

THANKS, DADDY. ARE YOU GONNA STAY THIS TIME?

SURE, HONEY, IF YOU WANT.

LIES.

SQUIRT SQUIRT SQUIRT SQUIRT

REMEMBER OUR SONG? "AS I WAS WALKING DOWN THE STREET LAST NIGHT..."

"...A PRETTY LITTLE GIRL CAME INTO SIGHT."

"I BOWED AND SMILED AND ASKED HER NAME,"

"SHE SAID, 'HOLD IT, BUD -- I DON'T PLAY THAT GAME."

DAD ALWAYS MANAGED TO SAY WHAT PEOPLE WANTED TO HEAR...

...THEN LEAVE THEM EMPTY HANDED. Y'SEE, I BARELY REMEMBER MY REAL DAD. HE WAS A FLIMFLAM MAN. I NEVER SAW HIM AGAIN AFTER HE GAVE ME THAT INHALER.

MOM RAISED ME, AND SHE WAS THE ONLY ONE I GREW UP TRUSTING. WHENEVER I GOT IN TROUBLE, MOM SAID I REMINDED HER OF HIM.

THAT USUALLY STRAIGHTENED ME OUT.

NOW, TWENTY YEARS LATER, I WORK AT THIS HOTEL CASINO IN RENO, THE POOR MAN'S LAS VEGAS. I'M IN CHARGE OF HOTEL SECURITY.

SQUIRT SQUIRT SQUIRT SQUIRT

IRONIC, HUH? ME, THE WORLD'S *MOST INSECURE*...

SHOULD WE BE IN BLAUFUS' OFFICE WHILE HE'S GONE?

ALICE, HE LEFT ME IN CHARGE, REMEMBER?

IT'S STILL HIS NAMEPLATE ON THE DESK.

JUST LOOK DOWN AT THE LOBBY. TO BUST A SCAM, YOU'VE GOT TO THINK LIKE A SCAM ARTIST. WHAT DO YOU SEE?

HOW BOUT THE OLD GUY IN SUSPENDERS WITH THE KID?

GOOD. WHAT ABOUT THEM?

LOOKS LIKE HE'S SELLING THE KID SOMETHING.

RIGHT. IS THE MARK BUYING?

CAN'T TELL -- CAN'T HEAR THEM...

FORGET THE WORDS -- WATCH THE BODY LANGUAGE.

THE OLD GUY'S WORKING ONE OF HIS SCAMS, PROB'LY THE ENVELOPE SCAM -- HE'S GIVING THE MARK SOME B.S. ABOUT ONLY BEING IN TOWN FOR THE AFTERNOON AND NEEDING A HOOKER. BUT HE'S AFRAID HE'LL GET ROLLED. SO, "WILL THE MARK HOLD IT TILL HE GETS BACK?" THIS IS THE *COME-ON.*

WHY DOESN'T HE KEEP IT IN THE HOTEL SAFE?

NO TIME. HE JUST WANTS TO GET LAID AND CATCH HIS FLIGHT, HE SAYS.

OH. IS THIS WHERE THAT "SHILL" COMES IN AS A THIRD PARTY, MAKING IT SEEM REAL?

THIS GUY'S WORKING IT ALONE.

THE OLD GUY SHOWS THE MARK $500 HE HAS IN AN ENVELOPE FOR THE KID TO HOLD.

IT'S REAL?

YEP. HAS TO BE.

NOW THE *OLD* GUY SAYS HE'S AFRAID THE KID WILL LOSE IT, SO HE WANTS THE KID TO PUT IN $500 OF HIS OWN AS A SHOW OF FAITH. THE KID HASN'T GOT $500, SO THE GUY SAYS, "HOW MUCH *DO* YOU HAVE?"

"$300."

"GOOD ENOUGH."

SEE HOW EAGER THE MARK IS TO COME UP WITH ENOUGH MONEY TO *GIVE* AWAY?

OK, CHARLEY, PETE, STAND BY. I'LL TELL YOU WHEN.

HE'S DOIN' IT. THE KID, I MEAN MARK, PUT HIS MONEY INSIDE, GLORIE!

THE OLD GUY WARNS THE KID ABOUT KEEPING THE ENVELOPE IN HIS BACK POCKET -- "TOO EASY TO STEAL," HE SAYS.

SEE -- HE USES THAT AS AN EXCUSE TO MAKE -- *THE SWITCH.* OK GUYS, PICK HIM UP.

THAT'S ENOUGH FOR NOW. YOU BETTER GET BACK TO THE FRONT DESK.

THANKS, GLORIE. THAT WAS PRETTY COOL. BUT YA BETTER MOVE THAT NAME PLATE, OR PEOPLE WILL THINK YOU'RE BLAUFUS. BYE.

OK, BUDDY, GIVE THE KID HIS ENVELOPE AND LET'S GO.

UH...

DON'T WORRY KID -- MY BUDDIES HERE NEED ME RIGHT NOW -- I'LL BE BACK...

BUT MAC, THIS ENVELOPE'S...

...EMPTY...

THANKS, GUYS. I'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

MAC.

MAC WHAT?

JUST MAC.

OK, "MAC". YOU'VE GOT FIVE MINUTES TO GIVE ME A GOOD REASON NOT TO CALL THE COPS.

HEH.

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

NOTHIN'. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

I DON'T THINK YOU GET WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE. *I'M* IN CONTROL HERE -- *I'LL* ASK THE QUESTIONS. YOU CON MEN ARE ALL THE SAME. THAT LAME ENVELOPE SCHEME -- GIMME A BREAK.

HE WAS A LAME MARK. WHAT CAN I SAY?

NO, *YOU'RE* A LAME CON. HURTING OTHERS JUST TO...

I DON'T HURT PEOPLE -- THEY HURT THEMSELVES. I JUST PICK UP THE MONEY THAT FALLS FROM THEIR POCKETS.

UNBELIEVABLE.

I'LL TAKE THAT AS A YES. HMM. YOU'RE NOT A SALLY -- THAT'S TOO CHEERY FOR YOU. DEFINITELY NOT AN EDNA -- EVEN *YOU'RE* NOT *THAT* FUNKY.

KEEP JOKING, "MAC". YOU'RE JUST DIGGING YOURSELF IN DEEPER.

THREE MINUTES LEFT.

JOKING?!? I ASSURE YOU...

...I TAKE ALL THIS *VERY*...

... SERIOUSLY ... UH...

GLORIE! THOUGHT I'D SAY, "BLAUFUS", DINCHA? SORRY -- I CHEATED. ACTUALLY I KNEW ANOTHER OLD GRIFTER LIKE ME...

...YOUR DAD.

THAT'S A CONVENIENT THING TO REMEMBER RIGHT NOW.

SO YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME.

WOULD *YOU?*

PROB'LY NOT.

SO WHO'S BLAUFUS? YOUR BOSS? KINDA RISKY, PRETENDING TO BE THE BOSS, ISN'T IT?

YOU'VE GOT TO REMEMBER TO CHANGE THE NAME PLATE NEXT TIME. DON'T WORRY -- YOUR LITTLE SECRET'S SAFE WITH ME.

EXCUSE ME FOR A SEC.

DON'T BE ASHAMED OF YOUR ASTHMA, GLORIE. YOUR DAD TOLD ME.

I'M NOT "ASHAMED".

THEN WHY DO YOU TURN AWAY? YOUR DAD GAVE YOU AN INHALER LIKE THAT, DIDN'T HE? HE TOLD ME ONCE -- I REMEMBER.

HE USED TO SING THIS OLD SONG. LET'S SEE -- HOW'D IT GO? SOMETHIN' ABOUT "BOWED OR SMILED AND ASKED HER NAME..."

"...AND SHE SAID, HOLD IT, BUD--"

"I DON'T PLAY THAT GAME."

GOD, I FORGOT ALL ABOUT THAT SONG! I GUESS YOU REALLY DID KNOW HIM. BUT THAT'S NOT GONNA SAVE YOUR ASS.

WHAT IS?

YOU'RE A PRETTY COCKY OLD GUY, MAC.

NOT COCKY. I JUST KNOW PEOPLE. THAT'S MY BUSINESS.

BUT LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR DAD...

HE WAS A CROOK, A LIAR, AND ALL TALK -- NO ACTION. THAT'S WHY I TOOK THIS JOB -- TO LEARN HOW TO NEVER BE A MARK MYSELF.

LIKE I SAID, KNOWING HIM CUTS YOU NO SLACK WITH ME.

THAT'S TOO BAD, 'CAUSE I KNOW FOR A *FACT*...

...HE CARED FOR YOU.

NOW WHO'S CONNING WHO. BUT I'LL GIVE YOU THIS--

-- YOU GOT ME TO LET YOU OFF. I RESPECT THAT.

ME'N YOUR DAD WENT WAY BACK. I COULD TELL YOU STORIES...

TIME'S UP. NOW BEAT IT, BEFORE I CHANGE MY MIND.

YOU WON'T CHANGE YOUR MIND.

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

YOUR WEAKNESS WAS A "TELL". I MAY HAVE PLAYED A FEW HEARTSTRINGS, BUT *YOU* DID THE REST.

THE MARK *WANTS* TO BELIEVE. BUT EVERYTHING I SAID ABOUT YOUR DAD CARING FOR YOU WAS TRUE. UNLIKE HIM, I DON'T LIE -- EXCEPT PROFESSIONALLY, OF COURSE.

NO REALLY -- WHAT'S MY WEAKNESS?

YOU GAVE ME FIVE MINUTES.

CLICK

GLORIE, I'VE GOT A CALL FROM YOUR DRY CLEANER ON THE LINE --

I'LL PUT IT ON THE SPEAKER, LISA.

HEY, TOOTS, GUESS WHO? LISTEN, I'M COMING BY FOR A "WITHDRAWAL" TONIGHT, OK?

UH... YOU THERE?

YEAH.

STUPID BITCH. WHY DON'T YOU F€%$*@ ANSWER ME THEN? %#@*€666!!!

AW SH*T, TOOTS! SEE WHAT YOU MADE ME GO AND DO?

SORRY, EDDIE.

LITTLE MISS "STUCK-UP PRINCESS" FORGETS HER ROOTS.

I GOTTA GO, EDDIE. BUT THIS IS THE *LAST TIME!* AND I MEAN IT!!

SURE, SURE, TOOTS. NO PROBLEM. THE LAST TIME. SEE YA TONIGHT.

THAT F%€*$BAST@*$#...

HOME

YEAH, MOM, I KNOW, BUT --

MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH

MOM, I DON'T CARE WHAT JENNY MACKLIN'S DAUGHTER DOES. I *LIKE* DOING THIS. BUT -- BUT YOU DON'T *NEED* KIDS TO FEEL COMPLETE. OR AT LEAST *I* DON'T... I AM NOT MISSING OUT ON A "NATURAL CYCLE."

MERV

MY CYCLE IS EAT CHIPS, PAINT MY TOENAILS, AND WATCH TV WITH MERV. OOPS -- THERE'S THE OTHER LINE. GOTTA GO. I AM *NOT* MAKING IT UP. I'LL SEE YA. BYE.

:SIGH:

OH, MERV -- HOW'D I GET MYSELF INTO THIS?

'CAUSE I'M A %$#* IDIOT -- THAT'S HOW.

FLUSH

DRY CLEANER, MY ASS.

STUPID NAME. I'LL TEACH THAT LITTLE BAS¢%$ TO RUN *MY* LIFE...

I HAD A DREAM. I WAS A KID AGAIN, PLAYING HOOKY IN MY BOSS'S OFFICE WITH AN OLD FRIEND FROM SCHOOL, NAMED SARA. ONLY SHE HAD A BIG, OVAL-SHAPED HEAD AND SAID "MEEP" A LOT.

THE HOTEL LOBBY WAS FILLED WITH PAPER AND GARBAGE. BUT WE WERE SAFE HERE INSIDE.

SUDDENLY, A DAGGER WITH A FACE ON THE HANDLE BREAKS THROUGH THE GLASS.

GARBAGE STARTS FLOODING IN THROUGH THE HOLE. I TRY TO PICK UP THE GARBAGE, BUT THERE'S TOO MUCH. IT KEEPS PILING UP.

THE KNIFE'S FACE IS THE CON FROM WORK.

HE LAUGHS.

IF THE BOSS FINDS THE OFFICE LIKE THIS, HE'LL GROUND ME FOREVER.

I CAN'T CLEAN IT UP FAST ENOUGH.

THEN I SEE WHAT'S ON THE PAPERS-- THEY'RE ALL DRY CLEANING BILLS!

KNOCK KNOCK!

SUDDENLY MY BOSS CALLS OUT, "GLORIE? I'M BACK! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY OFFICE?"

"YOU'RE JUST LIKE YOUR FATHER."

THE OFFICE LOOKS SPOTLESS, GLORIE. ANY PROBLEMS WHILE I WAS GONE?

NOPE. A FEW VAGRANTS, BUT I HAD 'EM THROWN OUT, AS USUAL. NO BREAK-INS. EVERY GUEST IS SNUG AS A BUG.

GOOD, I ALWAYS KNOW I CAN RELY ON YOU TO RUN THINGS.

I RESPECT A WOMAN THAT KNOWS HOW TO PROTECT HERSELF. THAT'S WHY I HIRED YOU. YOU CARRY A GUN OR MACE, RIGHT?

NO, BUT ONCE MY STEPDAD BOUGHT ME A KNIFE FOR PROTECTION.

DID IT WORK?

NO.

PITY. THEY DON'T MAKE THINGS LIKE THEY USED TO.

ANYWAY, THIS IS OUR NEW SAFE I WAS TELLING YOU ABOUT.

PRIVATE

DO WE NEED A HOTEL SAFE THIS BIG?

PROB'LY NOT, BUT IT LOOKS COOL.

SERIOUSLY, THOUGH, PEOPLE GAMBLE AND HOLD LARGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY, AND IT'S UP TO YOU TO PROTECT IT. I'M RELYING ON YOU, GLORIE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR OWN FATHER WAS LIKE, BUT I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF YOU AS... WELL, YOU KNOW...

I KNOW, MR. B. DON'T WORRY-- YOU CAN COUNT ON ME.

LENNY'S

TOMMY? YOU THINK I'M RELIABLE?

SURE. WHY DO YOU ASK?

BLAUFUS AT THE OFFICE HAS PUT ME IN CHARGE OF SAFE DETAIL, AND I DON'T WANT TO LET HIM DOWN. IT'S A BIG RESPONSIBILITY. I'M JUST AFRAID OF MY IMPULSES.

IMPULSES? YOU HAVE IMPULSES?

HEY-- I USED TO BE PRETTY WILD AND CRAZY BEFORE... ...WELL...

GLORIE, LET'S NOT GET INTO ALL THAT AGAIN.

SORRY.

EUNICE, HE SAID IT WAS JUST A ONE-TIME THING, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF I SHOULD KICK HIM OUT OR NOT...

WHAT ARE YOU NUTS? KICK HIM OUT!

THAT'S EASY FOR *YOU* TO SAY. JIMMY *NEEDS* ME.

LENNY'S

TOMMY, DO I MAKE YOU HAPPY?

:SIGH:

WHAT DOES *THAT* MEAN? I MAKE YOU WANT TO SIGH?

NEVER MIND. JUST SKIP IT. SURE-- YOU "MAKE ME HAPPY".

NO-- I REALLY WANNA KNOW!

I THINK THE REAL QUESTION IS, HOW I MAKE *YOU* FEEL.

I'M JUST TIRED OF GOING TO BED ALONE AT NIGHT.

YOU KNOW, GLORIE, THIS REALLY ISN'T THE BEST TIME OR PLACE...

OH GOD-- IT'S A "BREAK-UP SPEECH".

I FEEL LIKE WE'VE BEEN DRIFTING APART FOR A LONG TIME NOW. LIVING TOGETHER, BUT IN SEPARATE WORLDS-- YOU KNOW?

EVER SINCE THAT NIGHT, I'VE TRIED TO DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO BE THERE FOR YOU, BUT NOTHING I DO IS ENOUGH.

FIRST YOUR DAD LEAVING, THEN "HIM". I JUST CAN'T TAKE THE PRESSURE OF TRYING TO MAKE UP FOR...

EXCUSE ME?

TOMMY! YOU *BIG DOPE!* YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE UP FOR ANYTHING! JUST TELL ME I MAKE YOU HAPPY. TELL ME THAT MUCH, PLEASE?

I THINK IT'S CRUELLER TO PRETEND. I'M SICK OF PRETENDING, AREN'T YOU?

NOT YET-- NOT NOW!

JUST HOLD ME.

SEE-- WE'VE BEEN OVER THIS. YOU CAN'T EVEN GET *ANGRY* AT ME. THE MORE UNHAPPY YOU ARE, THE MORE YOU CLING, AND THE MORE I PULL AWAY.

OK, YOU SACK O' SH*T! YOU WANT ANGER? *I'LL* GIVE YOU ANGER!! EVERYBODY $#@₵* LEAVES ME IN THE END-- WHY SHOULD YOU BE ANY %$#₵@ DIFFERENT?!?!

IF YOU WANNA LEAVE, BEAT IT! DON'T DRAG ME THROUGH THE ₵%$#* MUD, PRETENDING TO CARE IN THE--

-- THE--

GLORIE! WHAT'S THE MATTER? CAN'T BREATHE? YOU LOOK BLUE! YOU BETTER--

THINK I'LL SIT DOWN.

DAMMIT! I DID THIS. WE BOTH KNOW YOU GETTING ANGRY CAUSES BREATHING TROUBLE. IT'S ALL MY FAULT.

DON'T KNOW WHICH IS WORSE-- LISTENING TO YOU FEEL GUILT, OR SUFFOCATING.

OK, IT'S COMING BACK.

GLORIE, CAN YOU HONESTLY SAY THAT YOU STILL LOVE ME?

I CAN'T DEAL WITH THIS.

HEY, LADY-- I PUT OUR NAME IN 20 MINUTES AGO.

SORRY, HON. I GUESS SOMEBODY FORGOT TO TAKE IT DOWN. I CAN PUT YOU DOWN HERE AT THE BOTTOM, THOUGH...

MUFFIN?

TOMMY, TAKE YOUR F¢$#* HAND OFF ME, OR I'LL RIP IT OFF YOUR ARM.

OH GOD, I'M SORRY. WE'RE *BOTH* PATHETIC.

NO, JUST WHEN WE'RE TOGETHER. SHOULD I LEAVE?

DO WHAT YOU F¢$%*# WANT.

GOODBYE, GLORIE.

YOUR TABLE'S READY!

THANKS ANYWAY, MA'M.

DAMMIT-- CAN'T BREATHE AGAIN.

SHOOT! MY INHALER'S EMPTY.

OK.

DON'T PANIC.

F**KIN TOMMY!

GOT TO RELAX. CALM DOWN...

MAC! WHAT ARE *YOU* DOING--

GOD, THEY'LL LET ANYBODY IN THIS PLACE.

OH GOD, NOT AGAIN...

HERE, BREATHE INTO THIS.

C'MON, LET'S GET OUT OF THIS NOISY RESTAURANT AND GO NEXT DOOR INTO THE...

...LOUNGE. THERE-- THAT'S BETTER. YOU OKAY?

YEAH, JUST RAN OUT OF...

AIR?

YEAH. SO, MAC-- YOU SNEAKIN' AROUND CORNERS NOW, TRYING TO CATCH ME ALL VULNERABLE?

EVERYONE'S VULNERABLE, HAS A WEAKNESS, A "TELL".

YEAH? SO WHAT'S YOURS?

FAIR ENOUGH. WE'VE GOTTA START *SOMEWHERE* IF YOU'RE EVER GONNA TRUST ME.

MY WEAKNESS IS I CARE ABOUT YOU. AND NOW MY WEAKNESS IS YOU *KNOW* IT. BUT LUCKILY YOU'RE TOO STUPID TO ACT ON IT.

DON'T BE TOO SURE.

EXCUSE ME, MA'M, COULD I--

DAMMIT! THESE BIMBOS ALWAYS IGNORE ME-- EVERYTIME! THEY KNOW I DON'T HAVE THE MONEY TO LEAVE A BIG TIP, SO THEY SNUB ME.

BECAUSE YOU LET 'EM. WATCH THIS...

HEY-- REMEMBER ME? FROM THE COUNTER?

A FIVE-DOLLAR TIP FOR A $2.99 BREAKFAST? HOW COULD I FORGET? YOU CALL THEM "LINCOLN'S", RIGHT?

GOT ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE HIDING UNDER THE MENU?

FIVE JACKSONS? GET OUT!!

WHAT'S YOUR NAME, HONEY?

SALLY.

TRY "JACKSONS".

SALLY, ME 'N MY BOSS, MS. ELLIOT, NEED TO CATCH A PLANE ON BUSINESS. SO WE NEED QUICK SERVICE, AND IT'S WORTH IT TO US TO PAY TO GET IT-- UNDERSTAND?

TOTALLY!

YOU LOSE A TWENTY EVERY TIME WE HAVE TO ASK FOR SOMETHING. GOT IT?

GOT IT.

WELL, *THAT* GOT HER ATTENTION.

SHE'LL SPEND HER WHOLE SHIFT WITH HER EYES GLUED TO THAT MENU.

I OVERHEARD HER TALKING AT THE COUNTER ABOUT HER BOYFRIEND. WHY SHE OUTS UP WITH HIM...

... IS WHY SHE'LL SERVE US.

YOU MEAN *YOU.*

NO, *YOU.*

OH, RIGHT. LIKE I'M GONNA BLOW A HUNDRED BUCKS TO GET GOOD SERVICE IN A RESTAURANT EVERY TIME I GET SNUBBED.

YOUR WEAKNESS ISN'T BEING SHORT A HUNDRED BUCKS.

YEAH, SO WHAT IS IT THEN?

HEY-- I'M NOT GIVING UP VALUABLE INFORMATION LIKE THAT. I CAN PUSH YOUR BUTTONS ALL WEEK WITH YOUR WEAKNESS.

AND IF I FIGURE IT OUT FIRST?

THEN *YOU* WIN, AND I *MOVE ON.*

IT'S TEMPTING TO FIGURE IT OUT, JUST TO GET RID OF YOU! AND YOUR PLAN IS FAILING-- SHE NEVER BROUGHT OUR...

... DRINKS...

ONE COFFEE AND A SMALL MR. BIPP.

WHAT'D YOU HEAR THE WAITRESS SAY THAT MAKES IT SO EASY TO MANIPULATE HER?

I TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HER INBORN WEAKNESS, WHICH IS TO TOLERATE ABUSE BECAUSE YOU'RE AFRAID OF BEING ALONE.

YOU TALKING 'BOUT HER OR ME?

YOU TELL ME.

REFILL THAT DRINK?

NO THANKS.

GOD, MAC. SHE'S REALLY STARTING TO ANNOY ME.

YOU GUYS OK OVER HE--

WE'RE FINE.

YOU'VE CREATED A MONSTER!

ME?!? YOU WANTED THIS, TOO.

YOU KNOW, THIS SCAM WOULDN'T WORK ON JUST ***ANYBODY.*** SHE'S A BORN MARK. A MARK THAT DOESN'T KNOW HER WEAKNESS...

THAT'S WHAT I MEAN-- KNOWING SOMEONE'S WEAKNESS IS LIKE A KEY TO THAT PERSON. GOD, I WISH I COULD DO THAT. SO WHAT ELSE ABOUT THIS WAITRESS TELLS YOU SHE'D BE VULNERABLE TO THIS SCAM?

CAN'T YOU SEE IT?

I'LL GIVE YOU A HINT: SHE SHARES YOUR WEAKNESS.

OK, MAC-- I'M HOOKED. WHAT'S MY GODDAMNED WEAKNESS?

IT'S NOT A WORD OR A PHRASE, IT'S AN ATTITUDE.

EVEN IF I TOLD YOU, YOU WOULDN'T HEAR IT. YOU'RE BLIND TO IT. HAVE TO BE. IF WE KNEW OUR WEAKNESSES BEFORE WE WERE READY, THEY'D DESTROY US.

WHAT A MELODRAMATIC PILE OF SH-*-T!

YOU WANT A *JOB?*

SHOW ME ABOUT PEOPLE. ABOUT SCAMS. HELP ME AND MY EMPLOYEES KNOW OUR WEAKNESSES SO WE WON'T GET SCREWED.

WORKING FOR YOU? DOING WHAT?

IF YOUR BOSS KNEW ABOUT THIS, "PAYING AN EX-CON TO...

... HELPING ME PROTECT *MYSELF AND* THE HOTEL."

I NEED TO KNOW HOW TO *PROTECT* MYSELF.

I WON'T BE HURT BY ANYONE.

AND WHO'LL PROTECT YOU FROM ME?

WHY NOT?

OH, YOU WON'T HURT ME.

'CAUSE YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO LEARN FROM *ME,* TOO.

EVER AGAIN...

SURE, KID. DEAL. HEY-- LOOKEE.

NO MONEY?

MAC, THAT'S PATHETIC! SHE WORKED HER ASS OFF FOR NOTHING!

COMING UP EMPTY-HANDED IS WHAT A MARK KNOWS BEST.

SO YOU *HIRED* HIM? I DON'T KNOW IF MR. BLAUFUS IS GONNA GO FOR THAT.

HE WON'T *FIND OUT* IF YOU JUST STAY COOL, ALICE. I CAN HANDLE MAC. DON'T TELL BLAUFUS-- GOT IT?

OK, IF YOU SAY SO. CAN YOU WATCH THE DESK WHILE I GET SOME TWENTIES?

SURE.

EXCUSE ME, BUT COULD YOU TURN AWAY WHILE I GRAB SOME MONEY?

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I'D DO THAT?

'CAUSE I $#%€ SAID SO, BITCH!

THE DRY CLEANER! SO *THAT'S* WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE!

GOOD GIRL. THAT WASN'T SO HARD, WAS IT?

COURSE, YOU'LL HAVE TO COVER THE DIFFERENCE FROM YOUR OWN POCKET...

... SO THE BOSS WON'T FIND OUT WHAT AN...

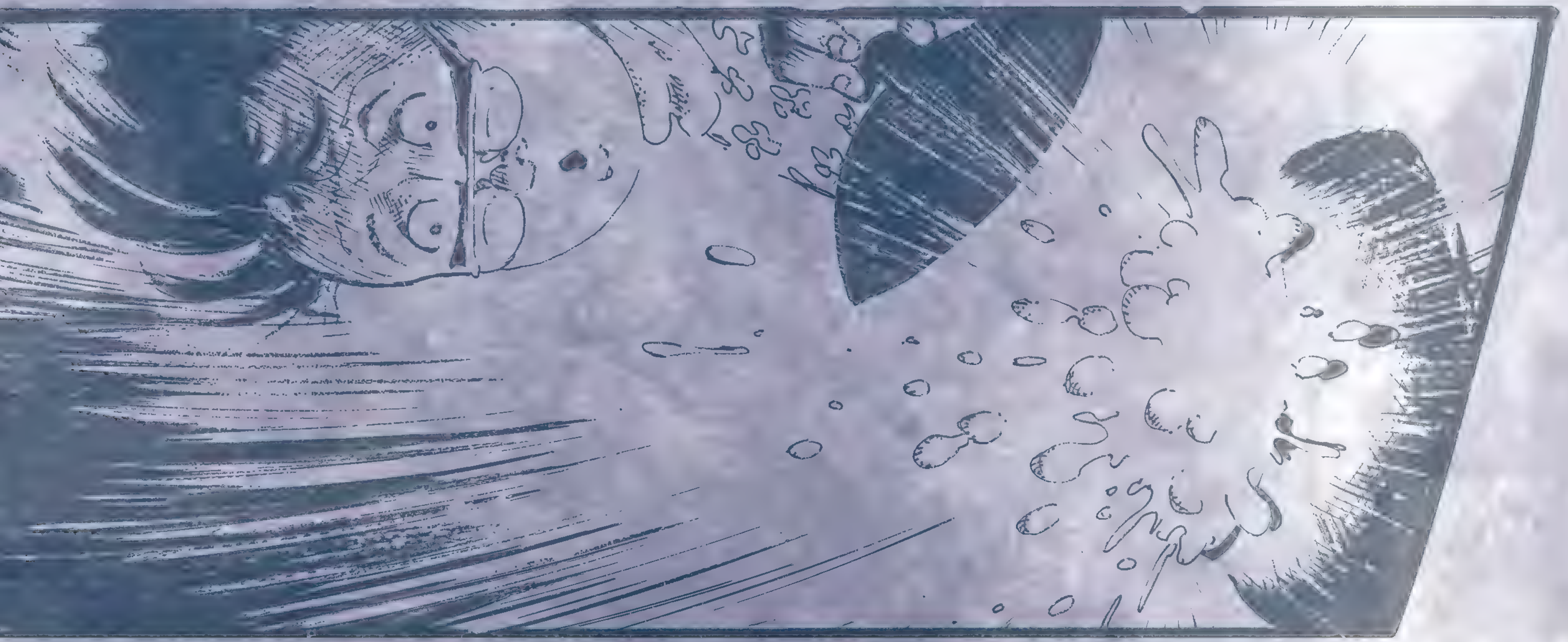
... UNLOYAL LITTLE SH☆T YOU ARE, HUH?

SEE YA, TOOTS.

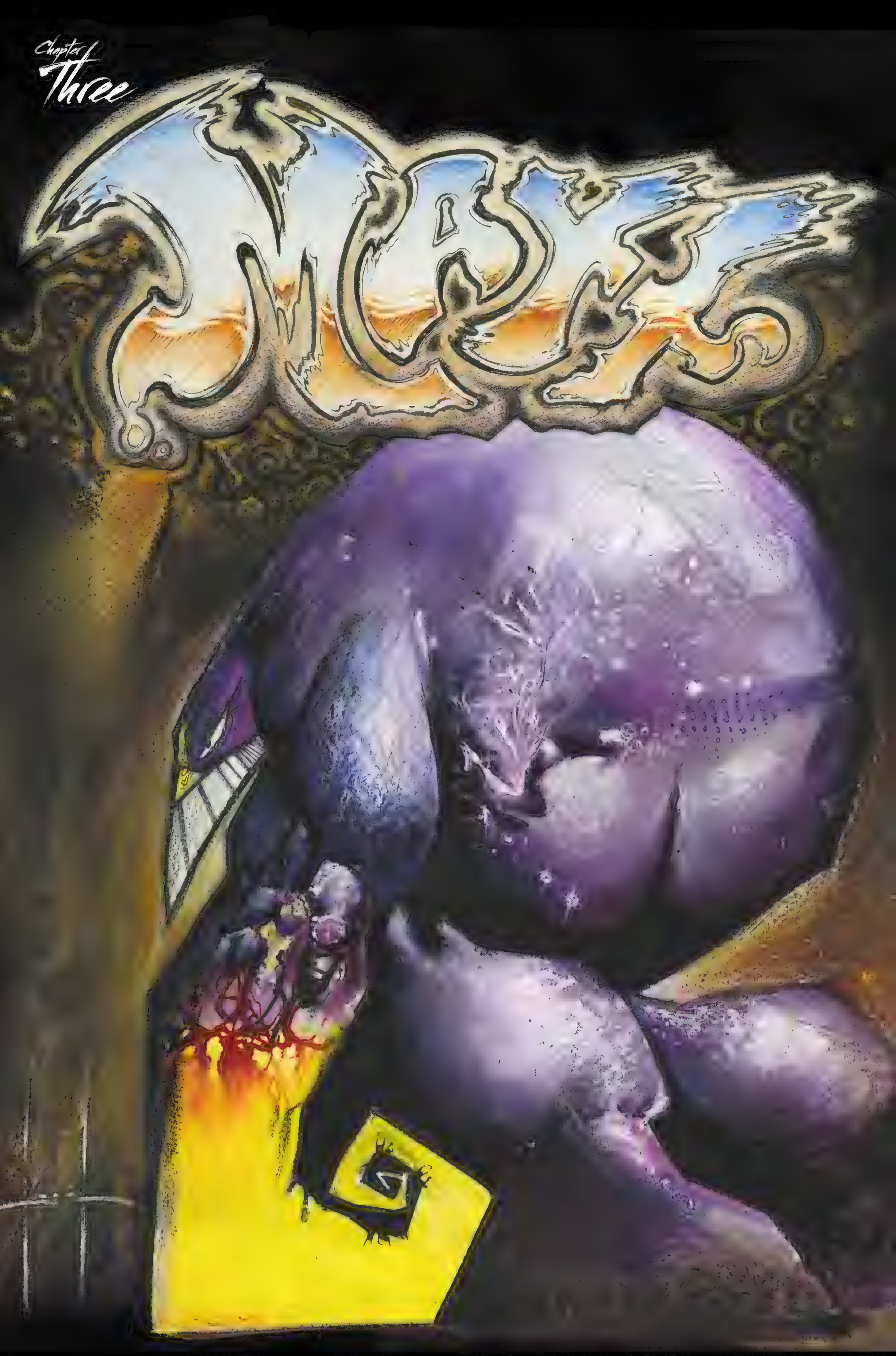
HEY, GLORIE-- I'M BACK, YOU OK?

...GLORIE?

END OF PART ONE



Chapter Three



HI KIDS, MR. GONE HERE. HERE'S A STORY OF MICKEY, DUDE AND THE ONLY GUY WHO EVER SCARED THE HELL OUT OF *ME*. HE'S CALLED... WELL YOU'LL MEET HIM SOON ENOUGH.

REMEMBER, IN MAXX 32, WHEN GLORIE OPENED AN URN OUTSIDE SARA'S BATHROOM, WHICH CAUSED THE WORLD TO END?

THIS STORY TAKES PLACE THREE DAYS BEFORE THAT.

MUSIC CUE: DVORAK'S NEW WORLD SYMPH., 2ND MVMT.

COUNTING BACKWARDS THEN...

... THIS IS THE THIRD DAY BEFORE...

... THE END OF THE WORLD.

MELODRAMATIC, HUH?

THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE IT.

THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE CREEPS. C'MON, DUDE, WE'VE GOT ENOUGH. THE CAR'S FULL- LET'S GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE WE'RE CAUGHT!

I KNOW. JUST ONE MORE... BESIDES, STEALING BOXES FROM BEHIND GROCERY STORES IS A TRADITION. THEY EXPECT IT.

SURE, SURE- BUT THIS IS A CRAPPY PART OF TOWN, AND I DON'T FEEL SAFE HERE.

WE'RE NOT. THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT *FUN.* DANGER. SUSPENSE. ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN.

ALL THAT'S *HAPPENED* SO FAR IS WE'VE BUSTED OUR ASSES MOVING, AND I'M SWEATY AND POOPED!

:SIGH: GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT, THOUGH. MAYBE I'LL SIT DOWN- JUST FOR A SEC.

I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW OUT OF SHAPE I AM! I USED TO BE ABLE TO GO ON A "BOX RUN" WITHOUT BREAKING A SWEAT.

UH HUH.

JUST SIT BACK AND RELAX. H'MMM. YOU SMELL GOOD...

KISS

WE CAN'T RELAX *HERE*- WE SHOULDN'T EVEN *BE* HERE,WE SHOULD GO... GO...

SMOOCH

HEY! OK, BUDDY- BACK OFF!!!

SLOBBER

WHAT'RE YOU F@%*K'N NUTS? DO I EVEN *LOOK* LIKE I'M IN THE MOOD?!?

I'M HOT, SWEATY, AND EXHAUSTED. SO FORGET IT!!!

IT'S OK, I'M USED TO IT...

:SIGH: AW GREAT, CLUB ME OVER THE HEAD WITH THAT LOOK.

WHAT LOOK?

YOU KNOW...

YOU GOT IT ON YOUR FACE RIGHT NOW!

LOOK, MICKEY, IT'S NOT FAIR TO ME! THE LONGER WE'RE TOGETHER, THE LESS YOU WANT TO DO IT- I'M ABOUT MY WIT'S END!

YOU'VE BEEN AT YOUR "WIT'S END" FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS. PICK YOUR TIME AND PLACE! YOU COULD SEE IF *I'M* IN THE MOOD BEFORE YOU GO AND... CLIMB ON ME LIKE I'M SOME BIG ROCKING HORSE.

OK. LET'S JUST GO THEN. SCREW IT!!!

WAIT- NOT LIKE THIS. LET'S NOT LEAVE MAD! BUT IT'S NOT MY FAULT. YOU HAVE TO SEE THINGS FROM *MY* SIDE, TOO.

WHO LOOKS OUT FOR *MY* SIDE WHILE I COME OVER TO *YOURS?*

THERE- HAVE WE MADE UP YET?

NO. I CAN'T EVEN *REMEMBER* THE LAST TIME WE "MADE UP".

YOU'RE RIGHT, I'M A BITCH. YOU SHOULD LEAVE ME...

I KNOW I SHOULD INITIATE THINGS MORE, IT'S JUST...

I KNOW, YOU NEED SOME HELP!!!

OK, JUST STOP AND LISTEN FOR A SEC.

DUDE, HONEY- YOU KNOW YOU DON'T WANT ME TO- IF I'M NOT *INTO* IT, RIGHT?

RIGHT?

OK, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT...

GO AHEAD- CLIMB ON!!! TAKE ME RIGHT HERE!!! I'LL JUST *LAY HERE,* AND TRY NOT TO *GET IN THE WAY.*

WHUMP!

THAT'S OK. I GET IT. KNOCK IT OFF.

OOPS. DID WIFEY "SPOIL THE MOOD" WITH HER NASTY WANTS?

GOD, I'M PATHETIC.

DON'T YOU GET SICK OF THIS? NOTHING CHANGES, ALL WE DO IS GO 'ROUND AND 'ROUND. THE SAME OLD CRAP.

YES, YOU ARE.

I KNOW AND AT THIS RATE, I'M NOT SURE WE'RE GONNA *MAKE* IT! YOU WANT SOMETHING FROM ME...

...THAT I JUST CAN'T GIVE YOU

I KNOW. SEX.

NO, SOMETHING ELSE. SOME NEED I JUST CAN'T FILL.

I'M PUTTING TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON YOU...

IF I COULD JUST RELAX, I BET YOU WOULD, TOO.

YOU KNOW, WHEN WE FIRST MET, IF WE COULD SEE OURSELVES NOW, I BET WE'D LAUGH AT HOW STUPID WE'VE BECOME.

YEAH, WHEN WE FIRST *MET.* YOU WERE SHY AND I COULDN'T GET ENOUGH! *NOW* LOOK AT US!

JUST RELAX, MICKEY, AND DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.

DUDE, STOP BLOWING ON ME.

OH- SORRY. I JUST...

SHHH-- DON'T TALK.

MMM, NICE. I LIKE THAT...

SMOOCH!

HEY- WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!!?

WHAT WAS *THAT!?!*

OK, OK, I'M SORRY. I DIDN'T THINK...

WELL, OBVIOUSLY *NOT.* NOW COULD YOU JUST...

... JUST...

... LIE BACK AND...

SURE.

C'MON, DON'T BE PISSED...

TELL ME YOU'RE NOT ANGRY.

I'M NOT ANGRY.

THANKS.

SURE.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE GONNA *DO* THIS, WHEN YOU *KNOW...*

SMACK

WHAT?

WHAT WAS THAT?

I HEARD SOMETHING. A CAR.

PROB'LY JUST SOME KIDS... CRUISIN'.

THEN WHY ARE THEY COMING TOWARD US?

I DUNNO, BUT LET'S GO. RIGHT NOW!

C'MON MICKEY- GET INSIDE! FORGET THE HATCH!

BROOOMM

SLAM!

THEY STOPPED, BUT THEIR ENGINE'S STILL RUNNING. DUDE, WHAT'RE THEY *DOING?*

F@#*K'N WITH US! C'MON, DAMMIT! DON'T STALL *NOW!!*

OH MY GOD, DUDE-

- THEY'RE COMING.

HURRY!!! HURRY!!!

I AM!!! F@#*K'N THING MUST BE FLOODED!

GOD.

OH GOD.

OH GOD.

OH GOD.

THE LOVE FOR THREE ORANGES

MUSIC CUE: THEME TO "JEOPARDY".

ALEX, I'LL TAKE GEOGAPHY FOR FIVE.

A SMALL TOWN IN MID-CALIFORNIA.

WHAT IS MANTECA?

SORRY. ZELDA?

WHAT IS LODI?

THESE ONE'S 'RE HEAVY, TRIXIE.

UH HUH.

THEY SQUIRM LIKE... FROGS.

THEY GO IN THE *PINK* ROOM, RIGHT?

YUP.

'KAY- CAN I GO PLAY *PONG* NOW?

SURE, MAYNARD.

WHAT HAPPENED?

WILL YOU JUST-

SOMETHING HAPPENED!!!

SO WHAT?!? JUST STOP FREAKING OUT, OK???

HOW LONG HAVE WE BEEN HERE, ANYWAY? AND WHAT WAS ALL THAT STUFF IN THE CAR? WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU IN THE CAR?

DUDE DON'T EVEN START...

LISTEN, MICKEY, THIS MIGHT BE *IT* FOR US. I JUST WANNA SAY, ABOUT THAT NIGHT AT THE PARTY SO LONG AGO-

I DON'T WANNA TALK ABOUT IT.

ME NEITHER BUT-

THEN *DROP* IT!

BUT THIS MIGHT BE OUR LAST CHANCE-

I LOVE YOU, MICKEY. I DON'T WANT TO DIE!

IF YOU'D JUST CALM DOWN AND GIVE ME A CHANCE TO THINK MAYBE WE COULD-

I THINK THIS IS HOW IT'S GONNA END... IN THIS ROOM!

OH FOR GOD'S SAKE, WILL YOU JUST F@*KN' SHUT-

OK, KIDS, IT'S ALMOST SHOW TIME. FOLLOW ME.

ON YER BELLIES, YOU PATHETIC GIBLETS!

CRAWL LIKE THE "BABY-GIBLETS" YOU ARE!!!

HOW 'BOUT THAT COUNTER TILE, SANDY?

IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DESIGN, STEVE.

ISN'T IT?

MMM HM.

YOU KNOW, LOTS OF TILES THESE DAYS ARE MADE WITH CHEAP PLASTER!

NOOOO!!!

REALLY! BUT NOT THESE...

TRIXIE, WHEN'S UNCA FREDDY GETTIN' BACK?

SHUT UP, YOU FAT F@% K!!!

....HOW LONG'S DAT?

WHO'S UNCLE-

WITH THESE, YOU *KNOW* YOU'RE NOT SACRIFICING BEAUTY FOR QUALITY! THEY HAVE THAT EXCITING DESIGN WITH THE LITTLE HEARTS AND BOWS...

I KNOW *I'M* EXCITED; ARE YOU?

STEVE, THESE ARE *SOME EXCITING TILES!!!*

IT'S CONTAGIOUS! GIVE US A CALL! ITEM #647-239...

YOU'LL SEE, LI'L MICKEY...

PLEASE, JUST SHOOT US...

SO YOU WANNA KNOW 'BOUT UNCLE FREDDY, HUH? HE'S NOT *LIKE* US. HE'S...

... PURE SHADOW.

MUSIC CUE: PROKOFIEV'S "MONTAGUES AND CAPULETS" FROM *ROMEO AND JULIET.*

THEY SAY ONCE, *LONG AGO,* UNCLE FREDDY WAS HUMAN, LIKE YOU GIBLETS,

... BUT HE PLUNGED DEEP INSIDE HIS DARKER HALF...

... AND NEVER CAME UP.

IT SWALLOWED UNCLE FREDDY WHOLE.

THAT'S WHY HE KNOWS STUFF WE DON'T! HE'S ALWAYS EATING HIS OWN FEEDBACK!

UNCLE FREDDY'S PLUMBING THE BOTTOM THAT YOU PATHETIC GIBLETS ARE AFRAID OF.

HE DOES ALL THAT...

... 'CAUSE HE LOVES YOU.

SSSSQEEEEEKK

HEY KIDS, GUESS WHO'S HOME!

UNCLE FREDDIE

UNCA FREDDY! UNCA FREDDY!

HEY, MAYNARD.

UH OH- SOMEBODY LEFT A COURLA TOYS ON THE BED. YOU TWO SHOULD PICK UP AFTER YERSELVES.

I GOT *LOVE* FOR THESE TWO, TRIX. THEY'RE GOIN' THROUGH SOME HEAVY SH*T, AND UNCLE FREDDY KNOWS ABOUT SH*T.

I'M THE FILTERING SYSTEM OF GOD. PURE INTELLIGENCE. JEEPERS- THE ABORIGINES KNOW THERE'S NUTRITION IN YER SH*T! IT'S GOT EVERYTHING YOU NEED!

LITTLE DOODY, I'M YER SHADOW, JUST AS TRIXIE HERE IS MICKEYS. EAT US, OR YOU'LL DROWN IN YER OWN FEEDBACK!

NOW LET'S HAVE SOME BEER!

MAYNARD, HOLD BLANCO UP SO HE CAN SEE BETTER.

AND NOW ITEM #236-428. STAINLESS STEEL CUTLERY. I KNOW I'M EXCITED.

SCREW YOU.

BLUB

BLUB

DUDE, YOU OVERSEXED CREEP- GET YOUR ELBOW OUTTA MY RIBS! YOU'RE *KILLIN'* ME HERE!!

WELL IF *SOMEBODY* WASN'T SUCH A *FRIGID BITCH...*

WITH WHAT *YOU* GIVE ME TO WORK WITH-

OK, FINE! YOU WANT DIRTY LAUNDRY? HOW 'BOUT THAT PARTY TEN YEARS AGO?!?

UH... EXCUSE ME?

YOU WOULDN'T DARE.

CRACK

WE HAVE TWO NAUGHTY CHILDREN HERE. AND IF THEY DON'T STOP BEING BAD LITTLE BOYS AND GIRLS...

... SOMEBODY'S GONNA GET SPANKED!

MAYBE ME!

IN YOUR DREAMS.

CUT 'EM FREE, TRIX. LET'S TEACH LITTLE MIC-MIC AND MR. DOODY A LESSON!

WOOO- WHAT WAS *THAT* ALL ABOUT?

THAT MUST HAVE BEEN *SOME PARTY*, EH, FRED?

I WANT DETAILS, SPILL IT.

NOT TALKIN'? OK, YOU LITTLE BRATS...

... DUCT TAPE IT IS!

OOOO- DUCKY TAPE! DUCKY TAPE!

LITTLE MICKEY-POO AND DOODIE-POO LIKE KEEPING SECRETS.

WAIT. WHAT WE'RE DOING, THIS...

... ISN'T RIGHT.

BLANCO.

WHEELBARROW! WHEELBARROW! WHEELBARROW!

WOOOOOSSSH

DON'T WORRY, LI'L PAL. OUR SPECIAL TIME HAS COME.

IT'S TIME TO PLAY

WHEELBARROW

DOES MY WIDDLE BLANCO WIKE PLAYING "WHEELBARROW"?

HE DOES, HE DOES, HE DOES!

WHEELBARROW ME, UNCA FREDDY, WHEELBARROW ME!

SQUEEK SQUEEK SQUEEK

ME N' BLANCO'S HAVIN' A PRIVATE MOMENT, MAYNARD. GO PLAY PONG.

C'MON, PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE...

PLEASE.

PLEASE.

PLEASE.

PLEASE.

PLEASE.

PLEASE.

PLEASE.

ZIP

IN TEN THOUSAND YEARS, YOU WILL SHOVEL YER OWN SH:T AND EAT IT, 'CAUSE YER ON RE-FEED!!!

OK, MAYNARD, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT...

WHEELBARROW! WHEELBARROW! WHEELBARROW!

BOUNCE BOUNCE BOUNCE

YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE... BIG POTTY! 'CAUSE A BEAR'S CATHOLIC! THAT'S CHAPTER ONE, YOU S.O.B.!

WHEELBARROW!

WHEELBARROW!

WHEELBARROW!

WHEELBARROW!

WHEELBARROW!

WHEELBARROW!

WHEELBARROW!

WHEELBARROW!

WHEELBARROW!

YOU BRAINWASHED YOURSELF, YOU STUPID C@%KSUCKER!

WHEELBARROW!

I MADE *YOU* UP, YOU DIDN'T MAKE *ME* UP. YOU GOT IT BACKWARDS!

YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE?

WHEELBARROW!

WHEELBARROW!

YER F%#KN' ***SEMANTIC BLOCKAGE!!!***

SEE? *YOU* DON'T EAT YER ***FEEDBACK!***

WHEELBARROW!

CRASH

WHEELB-

OOPS.

FREDDY MADE A BOO BOO.

YOU SURE *DID* HONEY.

NO, MAYNARD HAD A BOO BOO. *I* HAD AN *ACCIDENT.*

CHANGE BABY FREDDY, MOMMY.

GUESS.

PLOP!

HOLD IT, SPINAL JELLY. YOU AIN'T GOIN' NOWHERE 'TIL WE CHANGE MY BABY'S DIAPERS. GOT IT? GOOD.

DID BABY FREDDY MAKE NUMBER ONE OR NUMBER TWO BOO BOO?

I KNOW WHAT YOU TWO MUST BE THINKIN'... OL' UNCLE FREDDY'S GOT SOME PROBLEMS. HE NEEDS *HELP.*

AN' YER *RIGHT!* YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT TAKES TO FIND A GIRLFRIEND WHO'LL CHANGE YER DIAPERS?

THEY DON'T GROW ON TREES.

RIGHT, BLANCO?

BUT LET'S GET BACK TO YOU TWO.

WHAT HAPPENED AT THAT MYSTERIOUS PARTY THAT YOU TWO KEPT BURIED FOR TEN YEARS?

SOME DARK PERVERTED SECRET? OR MAYBE SOMETHING HOLY... ONLY FREDDY'S LOVE CAN SAVE YOU NOW.

WE'LL DRAG IT OUT EVEN IF IT *KILLS* YOU! EVERYTHING MUST COME UP! EVERYTHING!!! OOOOHH, LOOK AT THEIR FACES, MOMMY. IT *MUST* BE GOOD.

THERE YOU GO, HON- HOW'S THAT?

THE MOST MOVING EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE.

YOU ALWAYS SAY THAT.

IT ALWAYS IS.

OK. KIDS. HOLD TIGHT WHILE FREDDY GETS ON SOME WARPAINT.

MUSIC CUE: PROKOFIEVE'S *THE LOVE FOR THREE ORANGES.*

OK, TRIX, MAYONNAISE.

CHECK.

PACIFIERS.

CHECK.

SAFETY PINS.

CHECK.

SPATULA.

CHECK.

K-Y JELLY.

NOPE- WE'RE OUT.

DAMN.

BUG SPRAY.

CHECK.

THEN WE'RE ALL SET. THANKS, MOMMY!

DAD GUMMY- I BELIEVE WE'RE READY!

TRIXIE, MY FACE IS DRY!

LET'S BREAK OUT THE **OUTFITS.** WE'VE GOT A MARRIAGE TO SAVE.

Chapter Four

THE MASK

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I HAD THAT DREAM AGAIN.

MY GRANNY'S DIED AND I'M CHAINED TO HER DEAD BODY IN THE MIDDLE OF A DIRT ROAD.

I WANT TO ESCAPE, BUT I CAN'T. IT'S THE LAW. I HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF HER.

GRAMPS JUST IGNORES ME. HE WON'T HELP.

IT'S SO UNFAIR! IF IT WASN'T FOR *HER*, I WOULDN'T *BE* HERE!

THEN I SEE IT COME...

I THINK I SEE SOMEONE DRIVING TOWARD ME...

... BEARING DOWN.

... BUT I'M NOT SURE.

THEN, JUST AS IT'S ABOUT TO HIT...

... A LOUD RINGING WAKES ME UP.

OH, CRAP! TIME FOR SCHOOL

VOCALS GROUPS

'40s MUSIC'

BRRRiiiNGGGG!!!

BRRR

CHOMP CHOMP CHOMP

MONDAY

SNOOK

WHAT A WEIRD DREAM. I WISH IT DIDN'T MAKE SO MUCH SENSE. GRAMPS SLEEPS SO MUCH NOW AFTER HIS TREATMENTS-- HE'LL FORGET TO TAKE ME TO SCHOOL AGAIN.

IT'S MONDAY. ON FRIDAY MY WHOLE WORLD TURNS TO SH-*-T. SCREW IT! I'M TAKING THE BUS TO THE LIBRARY INSTEAD.

GRAMPS WON'T FIGURE OUT I'VE CUT CLASS.

BUS STOP

BUT GRANNY WILL PUT IT TOGETHER.

RING

YEAH, SHE'LL KNOW.

LEAVING HER HANGING IS A BOLD MOVE THAT I KNOW I'LL PAY FOR LATER. BUT I CAN'T TAKE IT! I'VE GOT TO ESCAPE, AND THIS IS MY LAST WEEK OF FREEDOM!!!

WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE WHINE

THAT'S WHY I'M FEATHERING MY NEST. I FELT LIKE A DORK RIDING ON THE BUS WITH A QUILT FULL OF STUFF.

AND I CAN'T CARRY IT THROUGH THE LIBRARY, BUT I LIKE SNEAKING IT THROUGH THE MOVIE ROOM'S BACK WINDOW, ANYWAY.

IT'S MY SECRET FORT, AND I'LL SPEND THE REST OF THE DAY JUST HIDING IN IT.

TUESDAY

YOU SURE? WHAT IF SHE BEATS ME UP?

JUST POUR IT. SHE WONT DO NOTHIN', WILL YA?

YOU SURE?

GO FOR IT!

ROOT BEER IS SO STICKY! PAPER TOWELS DON'T WORK WORTH CRAP. GREAT! NOW MY HAIR'S SOAKED WITH WATER, TOO.

I DON'T KNOW WHO I HATE MORE, THEM...

... OR MYSELF FOR *LETTING* THEM.

I COME OUT, LOADED FOR BEAR...

SLAM

... TOO LATE TO DO ANY GOOD.

AS USUAL, I WOULDN'T CONFRONT THEM. *INSTEAD*, I DUG OUT AN OLD PLAYBOY I FOUND...

... AND SNUCK A COPY INTO THEIR SCHOOL BOOKS...

... THEN WATCHED FROM A SAFE DISTANCE...

... AS ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE...

... WHEN THEIR MOMMY FOUND IT.

THAT GIRL'S GONNA PAY! YOU STILL GOT HER HISTORY BOOK?

YEAH, IT'S RIGHT HERE, BUT--

SHHH. WATCH AND LEARN.

Wednesday

I CAUGHT HELL YESTERDAY FROM GRAMPS FOR IGNORING GRANNY. I BETTER GET THIS ONE. DAMN THE EVIL DOOR!

CRAZY LADY. CRAZY LADY.

KIWI KIWI.

GRANNY WILL KILL ME IF I DON'T PICK UP IN TIME.

SHE GAVE UP. THANK GOD, BUT I'LL PAY FOR THAT ONE, TOO.

I LURK IN THE SHADOWS, DARK AND TROUBLED CREATURE THAT I AM.

HEY KID, CAN YOU GET THAT?

YEAH, RIGHT. LIKE I'M GONNA HELP *HER*.

C'MON, KID-- THROW IT HERE! I HAVEN'T GOT ALL DAY!

THAT'S THE SAME GIRL THAT STOOD BY AND LET HER FRIEND PICK ON ME LAST TIME. I HATE SOCCER GIRLS-- THEY'RE EVIL COWS.

DON'T BE A BABY! GIMME THAT!

MAKE ME.

OH, NOT SO BIG AND TOUGH NOW, ARE WE?

THE BRAT WON'T GIVE IT BACK!

OH, GOD! IT'S *HER*!!!

IT'S HER! AND SHE'S LOOKING RIGHT AT ME!

SHE SEES ME ACTING LIKE A STUPID BABY.

EVERYTHING SLOWS DOWN, AS I WATCH MY DIGNITY FLUSH DOWN THE TUBES.

IT'S OVER. MY LIFE IS OVER.

AND I THREW IT ALL AWAY OVER A SOCCER BALL.

WELL, IT'S ABOUT TIME, SQUIRT.

I CAN'T BELIEVE I F@%KIN' EMBARRASSED MYSELF THAT WAY IN FRONT OF HER.

ALONE-- JUST LIKE I WILL BE FRIDAY. AFTER THAT, MY WHOLE LIFE WILL BE LIKE THIS.

IT'S LOVELY, ISN'T IT. EVERYTHING HAS BEEN KEPT JUST AS MRS. DEWINTER LIKED IT.

NOTHING HAS BEEN ALTERED SINCE...

...THAT NIGHT.

AT LEAST I STILL HAVE SOME PLACE SAFE TO ESCAPE TO.

COME, I'LL SHOW YOU HER DRESSING ROOM.

THIS IS WHERE I KEEP ALL HER CLOTHES.

SIGH.

I REALLY BLEW IT TODAY WITH THE SOCCER QUEEN. THOSE OTHER GIRLS JUST MAKE ME SO MAD.

YOU'D LIKE TO SEE THEM, WOULDN'T YOU?

I SHOULD'VE THROWN THE BALL BACK. I DON'T KNOW WHY I DIDN'T.

NOW THE SOCCER QUEEN THINKS I'M A BIG BABY.

I WONDER WHAT THEY'D THINK IF THEY KNEW I WAS WATCHING THEM, HERE FROM THE SHADOWS.

SH-%-T!

WHUM!

BUSTED!

"PLEASE DONT SEE ME PLEASE DON'T SEE ME."

WHEW!

THAT WAS CLOSE! BUT AT LEAST MY CRACK'S WORKING OUT.

I'VE GOT THIS DOWN TO A SYSTEM. I COULD PRACTICALLY *LIVE* OUT OF THERE.

SOMETIMES...

... I WISH I DID.

LATER.

HEY, YOUR NAME'S MEGAN, RIGHT?

UH, YEAH.

C'MERE.

GREAT-- IT'S THAT BULLY FROM LAST WEEK.

WHY?

'CAUSE I SAID SO! YOU SCARED OF SOMETHIN'?

NO.

THEN COME IN HERE-- I WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING.

I SEE YOU WATCHING US FROM ACROSS THE STREET. I'VE GOT A MESSAGE TO GIVE YOU.

THE SOCCER QUEEN TOLD HER SOMETHING.

WHY DON'T *YOU* COME OUT *HERE?*

JUST GET YOUR SCRAWNY ASS IN HERE.

OK, *NOW!*

IT'S A TRAP!

GET HER!

THEY KNOW ABOUT THE EVIL DOOR! THEY'RE TRYING TO...

SEE, I TOLD YOU SHE'D DO THIS! SHE'S AFRAID!

PULL HER THROUGH! LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS!!

HEY-- THAT BITCH KICKED ME!

OK-- NOW YOU'RE GONNA GET IT!

OUCH

THEY CAN DO WHATEVER THEY WANT-- I'M *NOT* GOING THROUGH THAT DOOR!!!

WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS TO ME? I'VE NEVER DONE *ANYTHING* TO THEM!

THEY FEEL HOW HYSTERICAL I AM, AND THEY'RE FEEDING OFF IT. THEY *LIKE* SEEING ME CRY.

I FIGHT FOR ALL I'M WORTH, BUT IT'S POINTLESS.

I'M WEAKENING.

HANDS EVERYWHERE, PULLING, SCRATCHING...

I JUST WANT TO CURL UP AND DIE.

HEY! YOU THERE! LEAVE HER ALONE!

WE WERE JUST HELPIN' HER THROUGH THE DOOR.

YEAH-- BUT SHE'S WIERD AND WON'T GO. WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?

IT DOESN'T MATTER-- IF SHE DOESN'T WANT TO GO, DON'T MAKE HER! NOW TAKE A HIKE!

IT'S OK, HON. YOU JUST NEED TO GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FEELINGS.

LIKE I'M NOT NOW??

POOR KID. ALWAYS GETTING PICKED ON, HUH?

AWKWARD AGE. PUNKS LIKE THAT DON'T HELP NONE. BET SHE FEELS THE WHOLE WORLD IGNORES HER.

JUST FEELING ALONE DOESN'T GIVE HER THE *RIGHT* TO IGNORE THE RULES.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT

I KNOW YOU CAN'T HEAR ME, WHICH IS BETTER OFF, I GUESS.

I'M SORRY YOU'RE DYING, BUT I DON'T GIVE A SH-*T.

YOU *SAID* YOU WOULDN'T LEAVE 'TIL I'M READY.

WELL, I'M NOT.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE JUST GONNA DITCH US LIKE THIS.

I REMEMBER WHEN I WAS LITTLE... USED TO SIT ON YOUR LAP... FEEL SAFE.

YOU PROMISED I'D BE SAFE, GRAMPS.

YOU LIED.

YOU CAN'T EVEN HEAR ME 'CAUSE I CAN'T EVEN SAY IT OUT LOUD.

NEW DRESS!

THURSDAY

NICE TO SEE A DRESS FOR A CHANGE.

IT'S ABOUT TIME!

DANDY-- MUCH MORE LADYLIKE.

WHAT DO YOU THINK, MEGAN?

MEGAN?

I LOOK RETARDED. PLEEEEASE DON'T MAKE ME GO OUT IN PUBLIC LIKE THIS-- I'M BEGGING YOU!

IT'S FINE

YOU LOOK PRETTY, MEGAN. YOU WERE GETTING TOO BIG FOR OVERALLS, ANYWAY.

I 'OOK 'IKE A DORK.

DON'T TALK WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL.

I KNOW YOU REALLY DIDN'T WANT THAT DRESS. I'M PROUD OF YOU, BUYING IT FOR GRANNY LIKE THAT. I WON'T FORGET IT-- I PROMISE.

I REMEMBER WHEN YOU WERE LITTLE AND USED TO SIT ON MY LAP, TOO. AND I KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME IS A LOT FOR A GIRL YOUR AGE TO ACCEPT.

IF I WAS YOUR AGE, I'D BLAME ME TOO. I WISH I COULD STAY HERE FOREVER, BUT I--

YEAH-- JUST LIKE YOUR OTHER PROMISES.

GRAMPA!

COMING, MOMMY.

MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH

FRUIT

NOT AGAIN! I FINALLY FIND A QUIET PLACE IN THE CORNER, WHERE NO ONE CAN SPOT ME IN THIS CRAZY GET-UP...

... AND *THEY* COME OVER. THEY BETTER NOT *MAKE* ANY CRACKS ABOUT THIS STUPID DRESS!

CRAP! SHE'S WITH THEM! THE AMAZON SOCCER QUEEN OF LOVE IS SITTING RIGHT BEHIND ME!

PLEASE GOD, DON'T LET HER REMEMBER ME FROM YESTERDAY!

MAYBE IF I SIT PERFECTLY STILL--

IT'S NOT WORKING, I JUST *KNOW* THEY'RE WHISPERING ABOUT WHAT AN IMMATURE LITTLE JERK I WAS ABOUT THAT BALL!

I WANTED TO MEET HER, TALK TO HER...

... BUT NOT LIKE THIS...

OH GOD! THE DRESS!!!

SHE'LL THINK I DRESS LIKE THIS ALL THE TIME! WHY TODAY? WHY'D GRANNY MAKE ME DRESS LIKE A DORK TODAY OF ALL DAYS?

NOW THEY'RE PROBABLY WHISPERING ABOUT THAT, TOO.

IF I LIVE THROUGH THIS, I'LL HUNT GRANNY DOWN AND *KILL* HER FOR MAKING ME WEAR THIS.

I SWEAR.

I WISH I COULD JUST DISAPPEAR.

HEY-- WHAT'S THIS? THERE'S... BLOOD? ON MY SKIRT? WHAT THE--

OHMYGOD!!! IT'S HAPPENING-- RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW!

WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?

I'M TOTALLY F@%KING SCREWED!! I CAN'T EVEN GET UP!

WHY'S MY BODY *DOING* THIS TO ME?

I KNEW I SHOULD'VE PAID ATTENTION IN HEALTH CLASS. MAYBE I COULD'VE STOPPED IT.

I REALLY REALLY REALLY REALLY REALLY HATE MY LIFE!!!

I WONDER HOW INCONSPICUOUSLY I CAN CHECK TO SEE HOW BAD IT IS.

THIS SHOULDN'T LOOK TOO OBVIOUS.

OH, MAN-- IT'S EVEN ON THE BENCH NOW! EVEN IF I DO FIND A WAY TO THE BATHROOM, EVERYONE WILL SEE THE SPOT I LEFT.

SOB

CHOKE

SNIFF

GIMME THAT!

OOHH-- TOUGH GIRL, HUH? WIN A COUPLE O GAMES, AND NOW YOU THINK--

HEY! WATCH IT!

SHOOT! THERE GOES MY...

SHE CAN KICK YOUR SORRY BUTT ANY DAY, SPORT.

DESTINY.

I GUESS THIS IS MY DESTINY, TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE HERE ON THIS BENCH.

ALL ALONE.

WITH NO WAY OUT.

NO OPTIONS.

NO HOPE.

NO...

SNORT!

IT'S A GIFT FROM ABOVE!

PLOP

... AND MY WAY OUT!

OH WOW-- IT BELONGS TO HER!

SHE *GAVE* IT TO ME!

SHE KNOWS! SHE CAME THROUGH IN MY HOUR OF NEED! WHAT A FOXY SAINT!

OOPS.

BONK!

SORRY, BABE. YOU OK?

UH... ER, WELL... UH...

AND IN A HEART BEAT, SHE'S GONE.

THANK GOD SHE DIDN'T REMEMBER ME FROM OUTSIDE.

I'M READY TO ACCEPT IT NOW.

I'LL LIVE OUT THE REST OF MY LIFE HERE, ON THIS BENCH.

WELL, MAYBE IF I WAIT 'TIL CLOSING TIME, AND I'M THE LAST ONE OUT...

IN THE MORNING THEY'D FIND A MYSTERY STAIN ON THE BENCH.

I WONDER HOW THIS TUBE THING WORKS.

I THINK I KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE.

SNIFF, Y'DO?

UH HUH. COME WITH ME.

BUT THE BENCH--

SHHH, I KNOW. I PUT A BOOK OVER IT.

OH.

HERE-- MY SWEATER OUGHT TO DO THE TRICK. NOW STOP SQUIRMING.

SORRY...

CAN YOU SEE IT ?

NAW. RELAX. IT LOOKS FINE. BESIDES, IT'S A DARK SWEATER.

C'MON, LET'S MOVE.

OK. IT LOOKS CLEAR, LET'S GO.

WHERE?

TO GET YOU CLEANED UP.

BUT EVERYONE'S STARING AT ME.

N-P

NOT EVERYTHING'S ABOUT *YOU*, YOU KNOW.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS ALL HAPPENING TO ME.

MY LIFE IS OVER.

NO, HONEY-- JUST YOUR DRESS.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. NO ONE DOES.

UH HUH. KEEP WALKING.

HERE'S THE DEAL. PUT THIS INSIDE YOU AND TAKE IT OUT WHEN IT GETS FULL. OK, CONGRATULATIONS-- NOW YOU'RE A WOMAN.

IT'S N-NOT A JOKE.

NO, IT'S NOT. BUT YOU'RE NOT THE FIRST GIRL TO GO THROUGH THIS.

YOU SAY NO ONE UNDERSTANDS YOU. WELCOME TO THE CLUB.

PLEASE DON'T YELL AT ME.

YOU HATE ME, DON'T YOU?

WORRY IS MORE LIKE IT.

WAIT! BEFORE YOU GO,

WHY'D YOU...

... HELP ME...?

HONESTLY, MEGAN, WHAT MADE YOU THINK I WOULDN'T

WOMAN!

THAT GIRL!

SHH! HERE SHE COMES.

EXCUSE ME, M'AM, BUT ME AN' MY FRIEND HERE FOUND A LIBRARY BOOK THAT BELONGS TO THAT GIRL.

YOU MEAN MEGAN?

WHATEVER. HER NAME'S WRITTEN IN IT.

WELL, NICE TO SEE YOU BOYS DOING SOMETHING CONSTRUCTIVE FOR A CHANGE.

OOPS.

WHAT'S THAT?

UH... NOTHING YOU TWO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT. JUST SOME PAGES CUT OUT OF A MAGAZINE.

HEE HEE.

EXIT

THUMP

SHE BOUGHT IT. WHAT A DUPE.

MEGAN, WAIT! SHOOT! THERE SHE GOES. LOOK AT THESE PICTURES! I *KNEW* SHE WAS A "TROUBLED" GIRL.

FRIDAY... D-DAY.

WE'RE VERY DISAPPOINTED IN YOU, MEGAN. YOU'VE BEEN SNEAKING OFF TO THE LIBRARY EVERY DAY THIS WEEK...

NO.

SHE RUINED HER DRESS, TOO.

... AFTER I SPECIFICALLY SAID NO! YOU'VE GOT GRANNY'S NERVES IN A JUMBLE, AND YOUR ACTING UP HAS MADE HER SICK. IS THAT WHAT YOU WANT?

WELL, LET'S NOT GET INTO THAT... SINCE IT'S JUST YOU AND HER FROM HERE ON OUT, I THINK YOU BETTER FORGET THE LIBRARY *FOR GOOD.*

... COMING, MOMMY.

IT'S BEEN AN HOUR. IF YOU WOULD'VE STARTED, YOU'D'VE BEEN DONE BY NOW. C'MON, MEGAN!

I'M GETTING SLEEPY. I'LL DO IT FIRST THING TOMORROW.

WHAT'S THE POINT? LIKE *HE* GIVES A CRAP. IF HE REALLY CARED, HE WOULDN'T BE DOING THIS TO US.

SCRATCH

MEGAN, HONEY...

DOGS LOOOVE TRUCKS!

WE GOTTA TALK.

I'M MOVING INTO ST.MARY'S TOMORROW FOR MY CHEMO, SO YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR GRANNY NOW. 'CAUSE I WON'T...

... BE ABLE TO.

BESIDES, THAT HOSPITAL FOOD'LL PROB'LY DO ME IN QUICKER THAN THE RADIATION! HEH HEH...

YOU'LL BE OK. AUNT MABEL PROMISES SHE'LL DROP BY AND LOOK IN ON BOTH OF YOU. AND YOU CAN COME VISIT ME IN THE HOSPITAL.

YOU'LL BE OK...

I PROMISE.

MEGAN, HONEY... CAN YOU HEAR ME?

...MEGAN?

RIGHT. AND YOU'RE *STILL* NOT MEGAN. WHATEVER.

WHY ARE WE TAKING SARA TO GONE'S HOUSE AGAIN?

STOP! STOP! I'M STUCK!!!

TO CLEAR UP THIS NONSENSE ONCE AND FOR ALL.

SARA? YOU OK, HONEY?

SHE WON'T BE OK 'TIL SHE'S RETURNED TO *YOUR* OUTBACK, WHERE SHE CAME FROM.

BUT FIRST WE GOTTA CHANGE HER BACK, RIGHT?

UH... SURE.

ALRIGHT, LET'S GO. HEY, ARTIE, YOU OK?

YEAH, JUST GONNA MISS THIS PLACE.

WELL IT'S NOT LIKE WE'RE NOT COMIN' BACK, RIGHT?

YEAH.

HEY GLORIE, YOU OK BACK THERE? NOT TOO CRAMPED, EH ?

VERY FUNNY. I FEEL LIKE I'M STUCK BETWEEN TWO GIANT BOOBS.

YOU ARE.

HEY, ARTIE! YOU'RE ACTING KINDA GLOOMY AND SERIOUS. IS EVERYTHING ALRIGHT?

ACTUALLY, MARK, NOTHING WILL EVER BE ALRIGHT AGAIN.

NO WAY.

WAY.

IT'S OUT OF CONTROL. WHEN THIS CANDLE BURNS OUT, OUR AWARENESS OF HAVING EVER EXISTED IN THIS DIMENSION WILL CEASE.

THAT *TOTALLY SUCKS!!!* I WANT THE OLD MAXX AND JULIE BACK! FIRST WE'RE IN SARA'S BATHROOM, THEN I'M A TEEN FLOATING IN A BUBBLE WITH GLORIE, THEN I REMEMBER *SOMETHING* ABOUT A GUY IN A *DIAPER*-- NOW YOU'RE JUST GONNA PULL THE PLUG?!?

WHY DON'T YOU JUST CHANGE SARA BACK FROM BEING AN IS AND MAKE THINGS LIKE THEY WERE BEFORE?

YOU CAN'T GO BACK, MARK. THINGS HAVE COME TO A NATURAL END. EVERYTHING CHANGES.

WELL NOT FOR ME! I'M NOT GOING!!!

YOU DON'T HAVE A CHOICE. NEITHER DO I-- NONE OF US DO.

ARE YOU SAYING WE DIE?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENS... BUT THE WORLD AT LARGE, OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY, NONE OF US WILL REMEMBER THAT ANY OF THIS TOOK PLACE. SO YES, IN A WAY, WE DIE.

OR START CLEAN. TAKE YOUR PICK.

SO HOW LONG HAVE WE GOT?

IT'S 5:00-- THAT'S SEVEN HOURS. WHEN THIS CANDLE BURNS OUT AT MIDNIGHT, EVERYONE IN THIS TRAILER...

... WILL DISAPPEAR.

Chapter Five

THE MAX

11:30 P.M.

JULIE: IF YOU'RE READING THIS FAR, THEN THE PASSWORD, "FLOATING", THAT I GAVE YOU TO OPEN MY DIARY, WORKED. LIKE SARA, I HAD YOU READ IT, NOT TO ELICIT PITY, BUT IN HOPES OF SEEING ME CLEARLY.

DESPITE EVERYTHING, I RESPECT YOU THE MOST. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE ***STRONG*** ENOUGH TO GET US THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE. THAT'S WHY YOU MUST THE BE LAST TO GO.

I'M SORRY.

BY NOW, IT MUST BE CLOSE TO MIDNIGHT, AND I'M GUESSING YOU AND MARK WILL BE ALONE, THE OTHERS HAVING...

... WELL... YOU KNOW.

BY THE WAY, NOT THAT IT MATTERS ANYMORE, BUT DID YOU EVER WONDER...

... WHY A BOX?

IT'S IRONIC.

DAVE HAD MORE TO FORGET THAN YOU HITTING HIM WITH THAT BUICK. HE BECAME A BUM TO AVOID HIS MEMORIES ***LONG*** BEFORE HE MET YOU.

I REMEMBER FIGHTING HIM ONCE IN YOUR OUTBACK. THE ONLY WORD THAT WOULD STOP HIM WAS...

"MOMMY."

DAVE HAS NOTHING TO LOSE BY FORGETTING THIS WORLD.

"MOMMY" WAS THE ONLY WORD THAT KEPT HIM FREE OF THAT BOX UNDER HIS PARENTS' BED.

BUT IT WAS NO BIG DEAL.

REALLY.

ENDING SUCKS

6 HOURS EARLIER

RIGHT, "DAVE"?

HEY MAXX, WAKE UP. YOU HAVE A NIGHTMARE OR SOMETHIN'?

YEAH... I WAS A KID AGAIN...

WHAT HAPPENED?

NOTHING. IT WAS NO BIG DEAL. REALLY.

CAN WE JUST FORGET IT?

I'M TOO LATE! OH GOD!!! THEY'VE ALL DISAPPEARED! SH*T!!! IF ONLY I WOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN SUCH A LONG...

WHUMP

... POOP.

MOM?!?

DAVE???

ARTIE?

WE'RE OUT HERE, MARK. C'MON OUT-- IT'S TOO HOT IN THAT TRAILER, ANYWAY.

DANG IT, MOM, I THOUGHT YOU GUYS ALL JUST--

WE WOULDN'T LEAVE YOU LIKE THAT, MARK, I PROMISE.

BESIDES, WE'RE NOT DYING. NOT REALLY-- RIGHT, ARTIE?

IT'S JUST SEMANTICS, ANYWAY. LIFE, DEATH... METAMORPHOSIS. BUBBLES OF REALITY.

OK, KIDDIES. SINCE NONE OF US WILL REMEMBER ANY OF THIS, IS THERE ANYTHING ANYBODY'S ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW?

F%$K YEAH!

MARK!

YEAH-- LIKE, WHAT'S UP WITH THE SLUG?

WHERE'S SARA'S BODY?

WHEN DID SARA TELL MY MOM THAT SHE HAS TO BE SOAKED IN WATER?

IS SARA AN IS, A FAIRY, OR A FOOTBALL?

AND WHY ARE YOU KILLING EVERYBODY I CARE ABOUT?

WAS EVERYTHING YOU TOLD SARA 10 YEARS AGO A LIE?

WHAT'S "DIVERT EXECUTIONER (4,3)" MEAN?...

THE SOLUTION IS "HEAD OFF". "HEAD OFF" IS A SYNONYM FOR "DIVERT", AND MY EXECUTIONERS... WELL, YOU'LL MEET THEM SOON ENOUGH.

THERE'S A LOT OF INFORMATION I COULD GIVE YOU, BUT WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME FOR ENDLESS DETAILS, AND I DON'T THINK THAT'S WHAT YOU REALLY NEED

I THINK YOU AND EVERYONE ELSE ARE ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED THAT OUR TIME IS ENDING SO ABRUPTLY. BUT WE NEED EMOTIONAL RESOLUTION, NOT INFORMATION.

IF YOU NEED SOMEONE TO BLAME, BLAME ME.

OK, I'LL PLAY. WHY DO YOU ALTERNATELY HURT AND HELP ME?

UH... YEAH.

YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT. THIS IS NO ACCIDENT THAT WE'RE TOGETHER LIKE THIS. AND IT'S NOT JUST THE STORAGE BINS WHICH UNITE US.

WE'RE ALL CHILDREN OF SHAME.

BEFORE I WENT TO STUDY WITH THE ABORIGINES, I BEFRIENDED JULIE'S PARENTS. WHEN JULIE WAS BORN, SHE SOON CREATED AN OUTBACK BASED ON MY STORIES OF AUSTRALIA. INEVITABLY, SHE LOST HER INNOCENCE ONE NIGHT TO A RABBIT, AND BLAMED HER MOM.

I FELT A KINSHIP WITH HER, AND PUT HER CHILDHOOD TOYS IN THE STORAGE BINS, HOPING TO HEAL HER.

HER SHAME, WHICH KEPT GROWING, FESTERED INTO BITTERNESS WHICH SHE TURNED OUTWARD ONTO THE WORLD.

WHEN SARA WAS BORN, WE TOLD HER I KILLED MYSELF, TO PROTECT HER. BUT SARA FORMED A QUILT OUTBACK BECAUSE THE PAIN OF LOSING HER FATHER WAS APPARENTLY WORSE THAN WHAT WE TRIED TO SPARE HER FROM.

... A SLUG OF SELF-DESTRUCTION. THAT'S WHY SARA'S NAME WAS ON HER OWN LIST.

THUS WAS BORN SARA'S SHAME, WHICH TURNED *INWARD* ON HERSELF, CREATING A SLUG...

WHEN A LONE IS ESCAPED JULIE'S OUTBACK, IT WAS ORPHANED INTO OUR WORLD. OVER 10 YEARS, IT GREW TO THIS SIZE. WHEN SARA LOST HER BODY.

I KNEW IT WAS MY FAULT. BUT IT WAS ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY, AS I SAW THE END OF THIS BUBBLE DRAWING TO A CLOSE. PERHAPS TOGETHER, WE COULD FIND THE TIME WE'D BOTH LOST IN HER CHILDHOOD.

THOUGH THE DETAILS OF OUR LIVES WILL CHANGE, OUR *CORE* WILL REMAIN.

THUS OUR PERSONAL DILEMMAS WILL FOLLOW US, NO MATTER WHAT BUBBLE OR DIMENSION WE INHABIT. IN OUR NEXT BUBBLE, I MAY BE A PRIEST, JULIE A NURSE, OR MARK A GRANDPA. BUT WE SIX WILL ALWAYS PLAY A ROLE IN EACH OTHER'S LIVES UNTIL OUR SOUL JOURNEYS ARE COMPLETE.

SOUNDS PRETTY HOKEY TO ME. SO WHAT'RE OUR "DILLEMAS"?

AFTER SARA WAS BORN, AND BEFORE JULIE'S "QUSAK", I MET A MAN NAMED DAVE O. HE NEVER TOLD ME WHAT THE "O" STOOD FOR. HE WORKED AS A REPAIRMAN AT A NURSERY, FIXING THE WATER SYSTEM.

HIS HEART WAS FILLED WITH SHAME OVER CHILDHOOD EVENTS I WON'T EVEN TRY TO DESCRIBE.

DAVE WILL TAKE HIS PROBLEM WITH HIM, WHICH IS HIS BEING CUT OFF FROM THE FEMININE.

HE LOOKS FOR IT IN JULIE, AND PROJECTS IN ONTO EVERY REAL WOMAN HE CLUMSILY TRIES TO PROTECT...

...ALL THE WHILE IGNORING THE FEMALE SPIRIT ANIMAL WHICH LIES IN WAIT INSIDE OF HIM.

OH GOD. IT'S ALWAYS THE ***MOM'S*** FAULT. I'M SORRY, MARK. I'M PROB'LY SMOTHERING SOME FEMININE PART OF YOU RIGHT NOW.

UH HUH. I'M FINE, I'M FINE. LEGGO.

AND GLORIE...

DON'T START. I ***KNOW*** MY PROBLEMS, AND I DON'T NEED THEM BROADCAST TO EVERYBODY ELSE.

NO ONE'S JUDGING YOU, GLORIE. IF YOU DON'T WANT ME TO SAY--

UGGH!

WELL I DON'T!

THERE ARE INFINITE "BUBBLES" OR "ALTERNATE UNIVERSES", BUT YOU CAN ONLY FOLLOW ONE. MARK, YOU AND YOUR MOM SHARE A BUBBLE, JUST AS SARA DOES WITH ME.

CHILDREN ARE BOUND TO THEIR PARENTS' BUBBLES, 'TIL THAT PARENT DIES. YOU HAVE NO CHOICE. YOU'LL GO WITH JULIE AND LIVE OUT YOUR LIFE AS A TEENAGER WITH HER, AND I'LL GO WITH SARA. MARK AND GLORIE ARE ON THEIR OWN.

AS FAR AS DYING, IN THREE DAYS, THIS WHOLE BUBBLE'S EXISTENCE WILL CEASE. LUCKILY WE'LL ALL DISAPPEAR FIRST BEFORE WE HAVE TO FACE THE WORLD'S END. OUR AWARENESS WILL SWITCH TO A NEW BUBBLE-- BUT I CAN'T CONTROL WHICH ONE.

AND I DON'T CARE. JUST AS LONG AS THERE'S NO "AUNT RUTH" IN MINE.

WHO?

NEVER MIND.

MARK, THERE'S NO TIME FOR EXPLANATIONS, BUT I WAS A YOUNG MOTHER, AND I NEVER MEANT TO--

SMACK

OK, OK, JEEZ, MOM. TELL THE WORLD.

8:00 P.M.

GLORIE, GOT A MINUTE?

YOU TELL ME. THIS "NOT REMEMBERING WHAT HAPPENED" FEEL THE SAME AS DYING TO ME.

I KNOW. DON'T WORRY, IT'LL BE QUICK AND PAINLESS, I PROMISE. BUT YOU'LL PROB'LY GO FIRST.

GREAT! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT-- I WON'T EVEN HAVE TIME TO SAY GOODBYE TO ANYBODY.

THE ONLY THING I'LL LEAVE BEHIND IS THIS STUPID KLEENEX.

REMEMBER WHEN YOU HURT ME... LONG AGO IN THE LAUNDROMAT?

YEAH.

I THOUGHT I DIED BACK THERE, AND IN A WAY, I DID.

BUT SOMETHING IN ME SURVIVED.

YES! *YOU* SURVIVED. BUT WHY?

I DUNNO. BUT NOW IT'S ALL FOR NOTHING.

ALL FOR NOTHING? GLORIE LISTEN...

ALL THE PAIN WE'VE GONE THROUGH, AND SURVIVED, IS INDELIBLY ETCHED ON OUR SOULS.

WE'LL NEVER LOSE THAT.

BEFORE WE MOVE TO THE NEXT BUBBLE, WE ALL RETURN TO THE COSMIC WOMB.

LISTEN: JUST KEEP REPEATING...

THANKS, ARTIE. CAN I JUST BE ALONE FOR NOW?

SURE.

MUST GO TO MY WOMB.

MUST GO TO MY WOMB.

MUST--

HEY, GLORIE, YOU OK?

HEY-- DID GONE MAKE YOU CRY OR SOMETHIN'?

UH... NO, MARK.

I KNOW IT SOUNDS DUMB, BUT ARTIE TOLD ME TO "GO TO MY WOMB."

YEAH, MOM'S ALWAYS TELLIN' ME THE SAME THING.

NO, MARK, "WOMB", NOT "ROOM".

OH. YOU SURE YOU'RE OK?

YEAH, HONEY. I MEAN NO, BUT YEAH.

I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU CAN EVEN TALK TO HIM! MOM TOLD ME WHAT HE DID TO YOU.

I SHOULD KICK HIS ASS!

I CAN NEVER FORGIVE HIM, MARK. BUT I'M NO SAINT EITHER. I ONCE STOLE MONEY FROM MY OWN BOSS.

YEAH, BUT I BET YOU DIDN'T MAKE HIM DISAPPEAR.

AAGHOOOO

EVERYBODY KEEPS DITCHIN' ME WHEN I TURN MY BACK.

'SCUSE ME, GLORIE. I'M GONNA STRAIGHTEN HIM OUT.

HEY MOM-- WHERE'S ARTIE?

HE'S IN THE TRAILER, MARK.

I THINK IT'S REALLY LAME HOW YOU'RE ALL DESERTING GLORIE.

SHE'S GONNA BE OK, MARK.

BUT SHE'S *NOT* OK!

...NOW SHE IS.

I DIDN'T EVEN GET TO SAY *GOODBYE!* AND YOU'RE ALL JUST *SITTING* HERE ON YOUR *ASSES!!!* DOESN'T ANYBODY *GIVE A CRAP?!?*

MARK, YOU KNOW WE DO.

THEN *DO SOMETHING!!!*

WHERE'S GONE? FIGURES. HIDING LIKE A COWARD. SO WHO'S NEXT, HUH?

I AM.

JULIE, PLEASE TAKE THE BOY AND SARA BEHIND THE TRAILER. I DON'T WANT THEM TO SEE THIS.

THE MEN THAT COME TONIGHT WILL DO WHAT THEY SHOULD'VE DONE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

BUT DON'T WORRY-- MY SPILLED BLOOD WILL FINALLY SET ME AND SARA FREE.

WAIT, WAIT! I'M SORRY! DON'T LET 'EM HURT ARTIE, MOM!

MARK, SOMEDAY YOU'LL UNDERSTAND.

I DON'T *WANT* TO UNDERSTAND

FRANKLIN, WHAT THE @%$# ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT?

I SWEAR THIS IS THE LAST TIME I WORK WITH A $#@%ȩ*# ALIEN ABDUCTEE. I MEAN IT!

HAVEN'T WE DONE ALL THIS BEFORE?

MOM, DON'T LET 'EM KILL ARTIE!

LOOK, MARK, THIS IS HARD ON ALL OF US.

TRUST ME, KID, IF GONE SAYS YOU DON'T WANT TO SEE THIS...

... YOU DON'T.

HEADLIGHTS-- THEY'RE HERE.

DO SOMETHING!!!

MOM-- SARA'S CRYING. SHE *KNOWS.*

RELAX, MARK. ARTIE SAYS SHE'S REGRESSED TO A CHILD-LIKE STATE. SHE DOESN'T KNOW, SHE JUST FEELS.

BUT MOM... THAT'S EVEN WORSE.

OK, LARRY. NOW LET'S GET IT RIGHT THIS TIME!!!

YOU COWARDS, ALL OF YOU!

MARK GIVING HIS LIFE FOR HIS DAUGHTER'S THE BRAVEST THING ARTIE'S EVER DONE.

WELL, IT'S ABOUT TIME.

HE'S A SMARTASS, TOO. THIS'LL BE FUN!

I SEE YOU BOYS NEVER GOT YOUR HEADS BACK.

LET ME TURN AND GET A LOOK AT YOU... SOW BUGS, RIGHT?

HE'S NOT EVEN GONNA TRY TO STOP US.

LIKE HE'S GOT A CHOICE?

DAVE, I CAN'T KEEP SARA QUIET! SHE'S FREAKING OUT!

I KNOW IT'S SPLITTING HAIRS...

... BUT I'D RATHER DISAPPEAR THAN HAVE A BULLET IN MY HEAD.

STOP IT! STOP HURTING SARA!!!

SSSCREEEEECH!!!!

WHAT THE *F%@K* WAS THAT?

UH... SOUND LIKE SOMEONE GUTTED A CAT.

YEAH- WELL, IT'S CREEPIN' ME OUT! LET'S DO 'IM 'N GO.

IS ONE OF YOU NAMED HARRY? ONCE I ANGERED A BOY WHO LATER BECAME A SKINHEAD AND SWORE TO RETURN AND FINISH ME OFF. I ALWAYS THOUGHT HE'D BE THE ONE.

NO, ASSHOLE. NOBODY'S A "HARRY".

SHE'S LOSIN' IT.

CAN YOU BLAME HER? THEY'RE KILLING HER DAD, AND YOU'RE HELPING THEM DO IT.

HOW CAN YOU DO THIS???

MARK, FORGIVE US.

HOLD ON, SARA-- ALMOST HOME.

HEY PARNS, WERE YOU REALLY A SKINHEAD NAMED HARRY?

IT'S A LONG STORY GLEN. JUST A SEC.

BLAM!

THERE. LET'S GO.

POP

THEY'VE LEFT.

MARK, WAIT! DAVE, DON'T LET HIM SEE!

SORRY JULIE...

... IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT.

HEY KIDDO, YOU'RE RIGHT ON TIME.

DADDY? WHERE *ARE* WE?

JULIE'S OUTBACK.

WE MADE IT, HONEY! WE'RE HOME.

WE CAN STAY HERE AND PLAY WHERE IT'S SAFE.

YEAH-- BUT I'M STILL AN IS... WITH MY OLD HAIR IN SOMEONE *ELSE'S* OUTBACK.

IS THAT A PROBLEM?

I GUESS NOT. I'M SORTA GETTING USED TO IT. BUT I HAD AN AWFUL DREAM.

SOMEBODY WAS TRYING TO KILL YOU, AND I COULDN'T STOP THEM.

I'M SORRY, DADDY...

I TRIED...

I REALLY TRIED...

BUT I FAILED.

WILL I EVER HAVE TO GO BACK THERE, DADDY?

NOT 'TIL YOU'RE READY, SWEETIE.

GOOD. I WANT TO STAY HERE WITH YOU AND PLAY. DO YOU STILL LOVE ME AS AN IS?

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW HOW MUCH...

HEY-- REMEMBER HOW I USED TO DO THIS?

YEAH, THAT WAS COOL. I WISH MOM WAS HERE.

YEAH, ME TOO.

DADDY, DO YOU FORGIVE ME...

... FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO SAVE YOU?

9:00 P.M.

... BUT YOU DID, HONEY.

YOU ALREADY DID.

WE CAN BE TOGETHER NOW, HONEY. NO ONE WILL SEPARATE US AGAIN. NOW HOLD ON.

IT'S GONE! HIS YELLOW CAPE DOES NOT FOOL ME, MY QUEEN. ONE OF YOUR ISZ BITES AT HIS NECK, AS OUTBACK CREATURES DOG HIS EVERY MOVE.
IT'S OK, MAXX. HE'S WELCOME HERE, AND THEY'RE PLAYING, NOT FIGHTING...
IF YOU SAY SO, BUT I'LL STILL BE KEEPING AN EYE ON HIM.
FOR I AM...
YES, WE KNOW.
SO THE EVIL HAS A PLACE INSIDE PANGEA.
YES, BRER LAPIN, AFTER ALL...
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA
...WHERE ELSE ARE YA GONNA PUT IT?

10:00 P.M.

WE'RE THE LAST ONES LEFT, AND NOW I'VE DESTROYED MARK. HE HATES ME.

HE'S STRONGER THAN YOU THINK. HE ASKED ME TO CALL HIM IF YOU START DISAPPEARING. HE WANTS TO BE WITH YOU WHEN YOU GO.

HE DOESN'T HATE YOU.

THEN WHY'S HE POUTING IN THE TRAILER?

HE'S A BOY. HE NEVER HAD TO LOSE ANYBODY CLOSE, LET ALONE FIVE IN ONE NIGHT.

YEAH, THAT'S TOUGH.

CAN YOU FEEL GONE AND SARA IN YOUR MIND?

NAW, BUT I'M SURE THEY'RE THERE. WE'D'VE HEARD IF THEY DIDN'T MAKE IT.

BOY, HELL OF A NIGHT, HUH?

DAVE. I LOVE YOU. ALWAYS HAVE.

I FEEL CLOSER TO YOU AS A FRIEND THAN ANY OF MY SO-CALLED "LOVERS".

JUL, DON'T START. YOU'LL BREAK ME UP.

TOO LATE. HEY, GONE SAYS I'LL GET MY FINGERS BACK IN THE NEXT BUBBLE. TOO BAD I WON'T REMEMBER THEY WERE EVEN MISSING. HA HA.

HEY-- REMEMBER THESE?

HA.

YOU DON'T WANT TO CLIP MY TOENAILS?

IS THAT SOMETHING WE USED TO DO?

I'M KINDA FUZZY ON ALL THAT MAXX STUFF, MOSTLY BEING DAVE NOW. SORRY.

OH... S'OKAY.

SO DO YOU THINK WE'LL EVEN *KNOW* EACH OTHER IN THE NEXT... WHATEVER?

SURE. MAYBE YOU'LL EVEN GET ME TO CLIP YOUR NAILS. 'COURSE YOU MIGHT BE MY GRANNY...

DON'T EVEN JOKE THAT WAY.

HEY, ME 'N MY GRANNY WERE CLOSE. GIMME THOSE.

OK, BUT I'M KEEPIN' 'EM. IT'S MY WAY OF REMEMBERING THE OLD MAXX.

WHAT IF YOU DON'T REMEMBER?

I WILL.

11:30 P.M.

DESPITE EVERYTHING, I RESPECT YOU THE MOST. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE STRONG ENOUGH TO GET US THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE. THAT'S WHY YOU MUST GO LAST.

I'M SORRY.

BY NOW IT MUST BE CLOSE TO MIDNIGHT, AND I'M GUESSING YOU AND MARK WILL BE ALONE, THE OTHERS HAVING...

... WELL... YOU KNOW.

HELLO-- ANYBODY HOME?

OH, YOU MUST BE GAYNOR. ARTIE WROTE YOU'D BE COMING BY.

HOW YOU HOLDIN' UP, KIDDO?

I'M A TOTAL BASKET CASE. BUT IT'S HARDEST ON MY SON.

I BET. THAT HIM ASLEEP OVER THERE?

YEAH.

LET ME HELP YOU CLEAN UP THIS "MESS".

THANKS. I'M STILL CONFUSED WHY YOU'RE PICKING UP HIS BODY, JUST SO HIS TRAILER WILL BE EMPTY WHEN THE WORLD ENDS?

NEATNESS COUNTS.

SO YOU'RE NOT COMING WITH US? I THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO BE NEAR HIM IN THE END.

I AM! HE'S IN MY DAMN TRUNK, HONEY!

BESIDES, JUST BECAUSE WE'RE NOT IN THE SAME ROOM, DOESN'T MEAN WE WON'T...

... ALWAYS BE TOGETHER.

TRUST ME. WELL, I'M OFF.

11:45 P.M.

MOM? YOU STILL THERE?

MARK, FOR THE TWENTIETH TIME, YES, I'M STILL HERE!

WELL... OK. BUT SQUEAL OR SOMETHIN' IF YOU FEEL YOURSELF FADIN' AWAY, OK?

I PROMISE, I WON'T F#$KING GO WITHOUT YOU!

SLAM

LIAR LIAR LIAR.

GONE WROTE TWO LAST THINGS.

HE SAID THERE WAS A CHANCE I'D GO BEFORE MARK, BUT NOT TO TELL HIM.

BESIDES, MAYBE WE'LL GET LUCKY AND GO TOGETHER.

THE SECOND WAS A CLUE.

ARTIE WROTE THAT THE CANDLE WASN'T REALLY A CANDLE.

IT WAS A BEACON.

AND UPON BURNING OUT, IT WOULD BECOME A SNOW GLOBE...

... WHICH WOULD FOLLOW US INTO THE NEXT BUBBLE.

WANNA HEAR A STORY, SWEETIE?

ANYTHING BUT THE LIBRARY GIRL.

THIS ORNAMENT WILL CAUSE ONE OF US, WE DON'T KNOW WHICH, TO REMEMBER.

GONE'S ONLY CONCERN WAS THAT IT WOULD GET BROKEN BEFORE THE RIGHT PERSON SEES IT.

OK, ONCE UPON A TIME...

PLEASE LET US GO TOGETHER.

11:55 P.M.

MOM?

MOMMY?

11:56 P.M.

11:57 P.M.

DON'T PANIC.

I NEVER GOT TO SAY GOODBYE TO DAVE, SARA, ANYBODY.

I DIDN'T EVEN LET MOM TELL ME THE CRAPPY STORY. I DESERVE TO DISAPPEAR.

11:58 P.M.

11:59 P.M.

I'D GIVE ANYTHING TO HEAR HER VOICE. ANYTHING.

ANY--

12:00 A.M.

DR. PENDER? YOU IN HERE?

YEAH, DAVE. JUST THOUGHT I'D WORK A LITTLE LATE TONIGHT.

KINDA DARK TO BE GRADING PAPERS, ISN'T IT?

OH... RIGHT. GO AHEAD AND TURN ON THE LIGHT. I WAS JUST THINKING.

'BOUT WHAT?

ABOUT LIFE. I NEVER PLANNED TO TEACH AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE-- I JUST WOUND UP DOING IT. JUST MAKES YA THINK.

DON'T YOU EVER REGRET THE ROAD YOUR LIFE HAS TAKEN?

I DIDN'T PLAN ON BEING A JANITOR, EITHER, BUT I DON'T BEAT MYSELF UP ABOUT IT.

HEY DOC, WHAT'D YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BE WHEN YOU WERE A KID?

OH, I DUNNO. MAYBE SOMETHING EXOTIC-- A MAGICIAN. MAYBE AN INDIAN. I ALWAYS HATED COWBOYS.

ME TOO.

MAYBE YOU ALREADY *ARE* A MAGICIAN, BUT YOU JUST DON'T KNOW IT. HEH HEH.

LISTEN, DOC, WHEN I WAS A LITTLE BOY, AND THE GIRL NEXT DOOR MOVED AWAY, I THOUGHT MY WHOLE LIFE HAD ENDED.

AND NOW THAT YOU'RE OLDER, YOU SEE OTHERWISE.

I'VE TOLD YOU THIS ALREADY, HUH?

YEAH, BUT TELL ME AGAIN...

HEY, WHERE'D THAT SNOW GLOBE ON YOUR DESK COME FROM?

I DON'T KNOW. IT WASN'T THERE A MINUTE AGO...

11:00 A.M. PST

MARK, GET UP. YOU FORGOT TO FEED THE CHICKENS AGAIN.

SORRY, MOM. I OVERSLEPT. THOSE DAMN MONKEYS NEXT DOOR... SCREECHING AND KEEPING ME UP ALL NIGHT... MADE MY STOMACH HURT.

THE OLD STOMACH THING AGAIN, HUH. OH SH*T!

OK, I'M NOT GONNA SCREAM. THESE DAMN CHEAP GARBAGE BAGS...

RRIPPP!!

SORRY-- I GUESS BROKEN GLASS AND PLASTIC DON'T GO TOGETHER SO GOOD...

WELL, THAT WOULD DO IT.

LOOK AT ALL THIS USELESS JUNK! NO WONDER YOU'RE THROWING IT ALL OUT...

LIKE THESE CLIPPERS. THEY'RE SO OLD, I BET THEY DON'T EVEN WORK ANYMORE.

GIMME THOSE.

HUH? NOW AN OLD PAIR OF CLIPPERS GETS YOU WEEPY! WHY?

I DUNNO. I DON'T NEED A REASON, JUST BACK OFF.

OK, OK. JUST KIDDING...

UH, MOM, REMEMBER THAT OLD STORY ABOUT THAT *GIRL* YOU USED TO TELL ME?

THE ONE YOU ALWAYS BITCHED ABOUT?

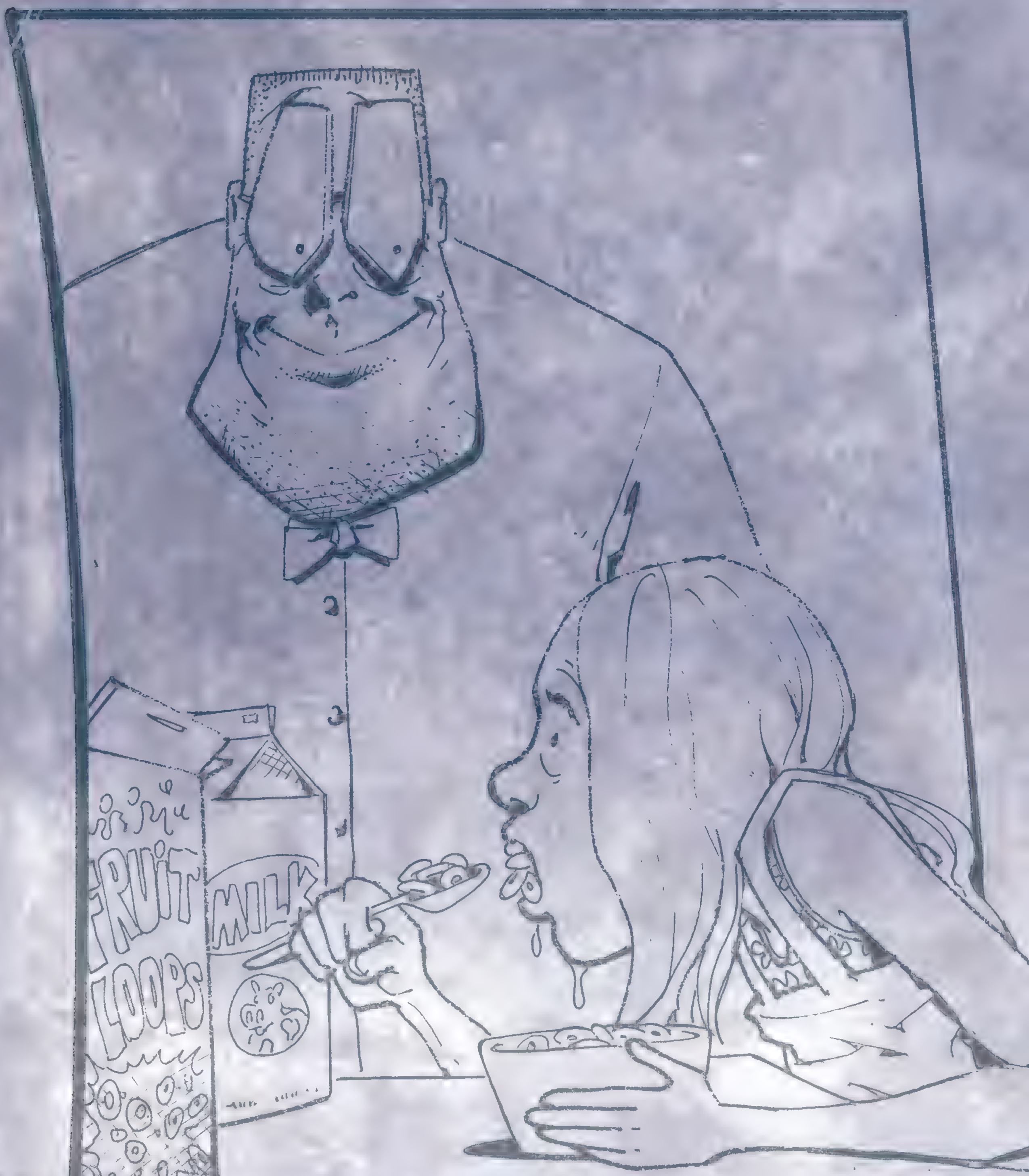
UH, YEAH. I COULD STAND TO HEAR IT AGAIN.

YOU REALLY WANT TO HEAR IT, OR ARE YOU JUST HUMORING ME?

JUST HUMORING.

I CAN LIVE WITH THAT. ONCE UPON A TIME, I KNEW A GIRL NAMED MEGAN...

SEE, THAT WASN'T SO BAD, WAS IT?


FRUIT
MILK

THE MAXX

THE MASK™

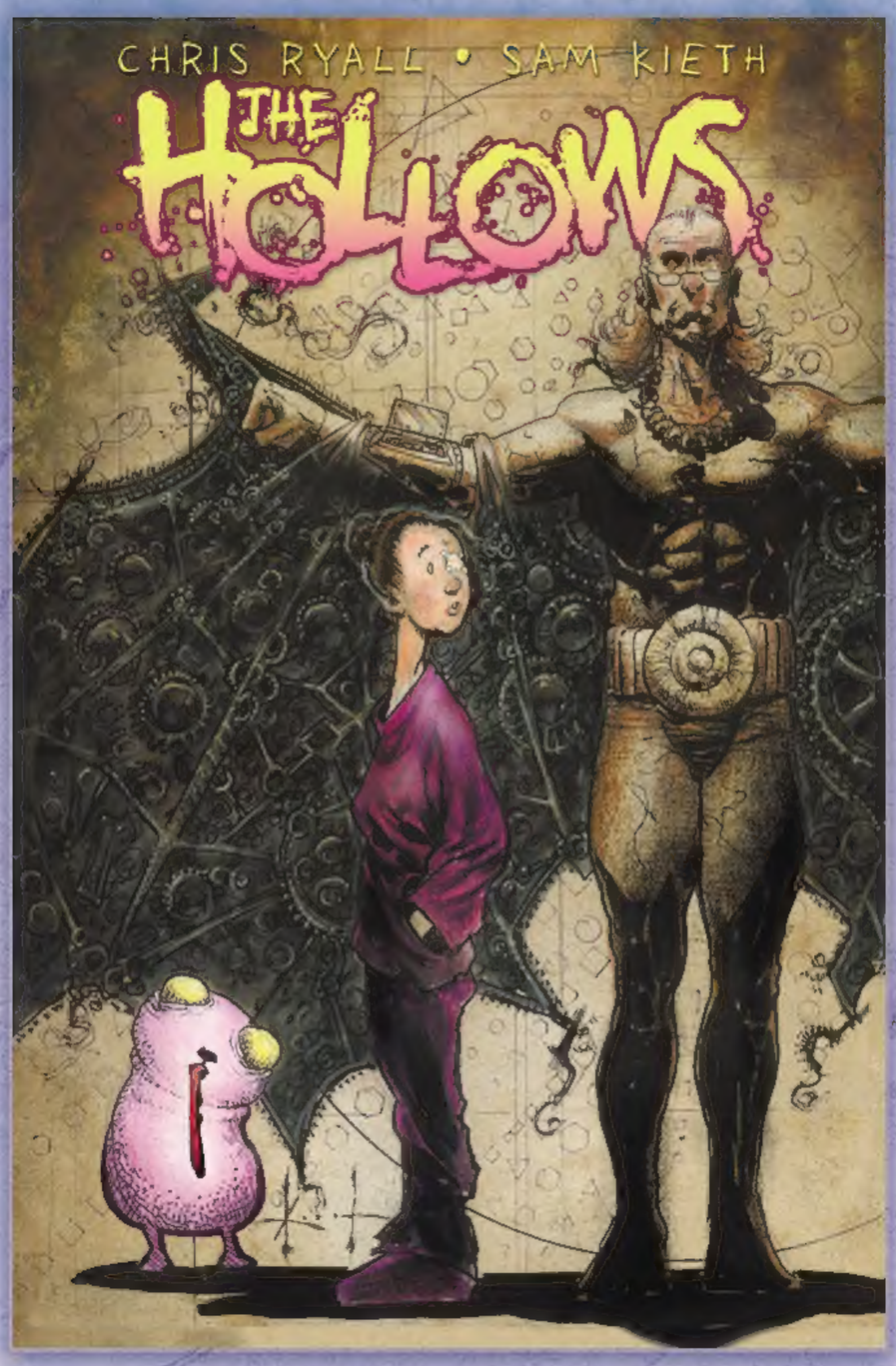
THE MAN

THE WALL

MEGAN, WE'VE GOT TO TALK.

Sam Kieth

ALSO AVAILABLE



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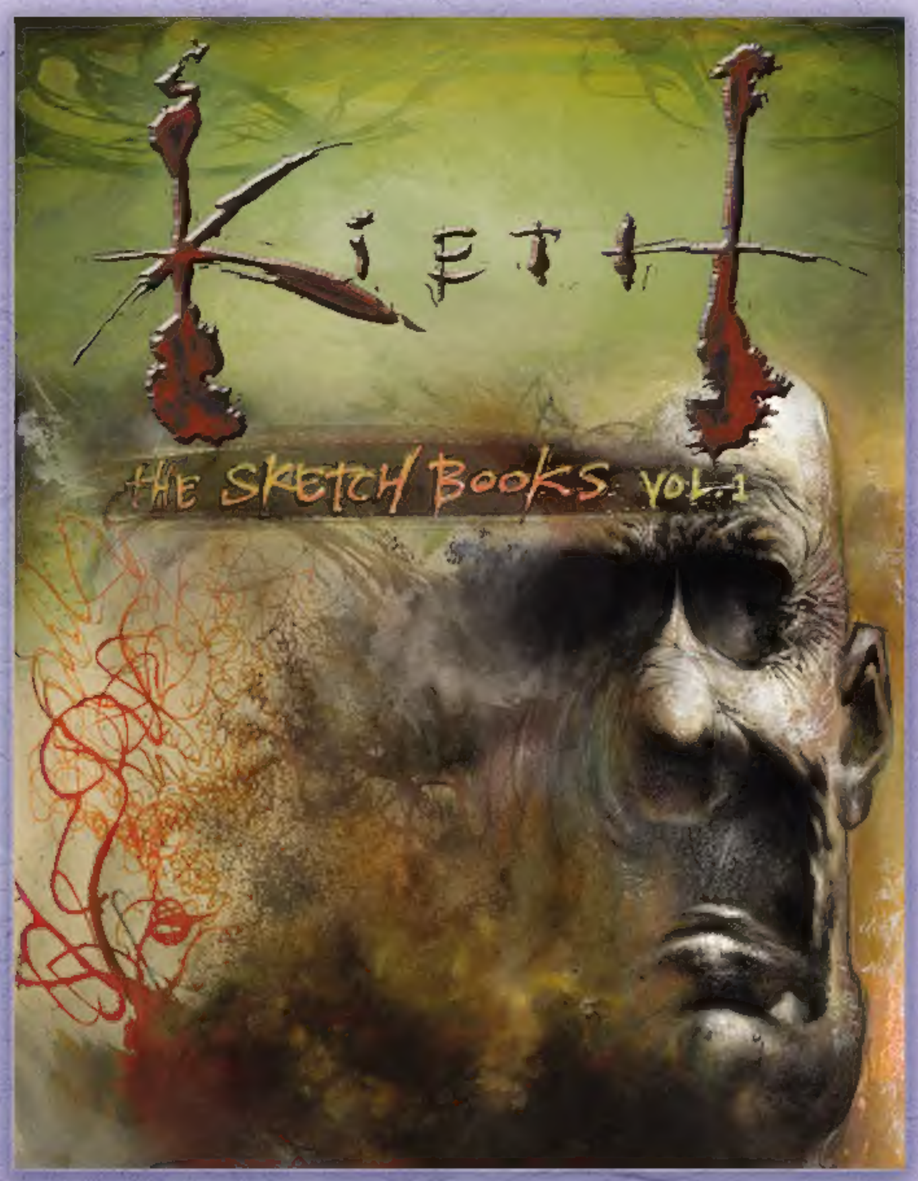

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